









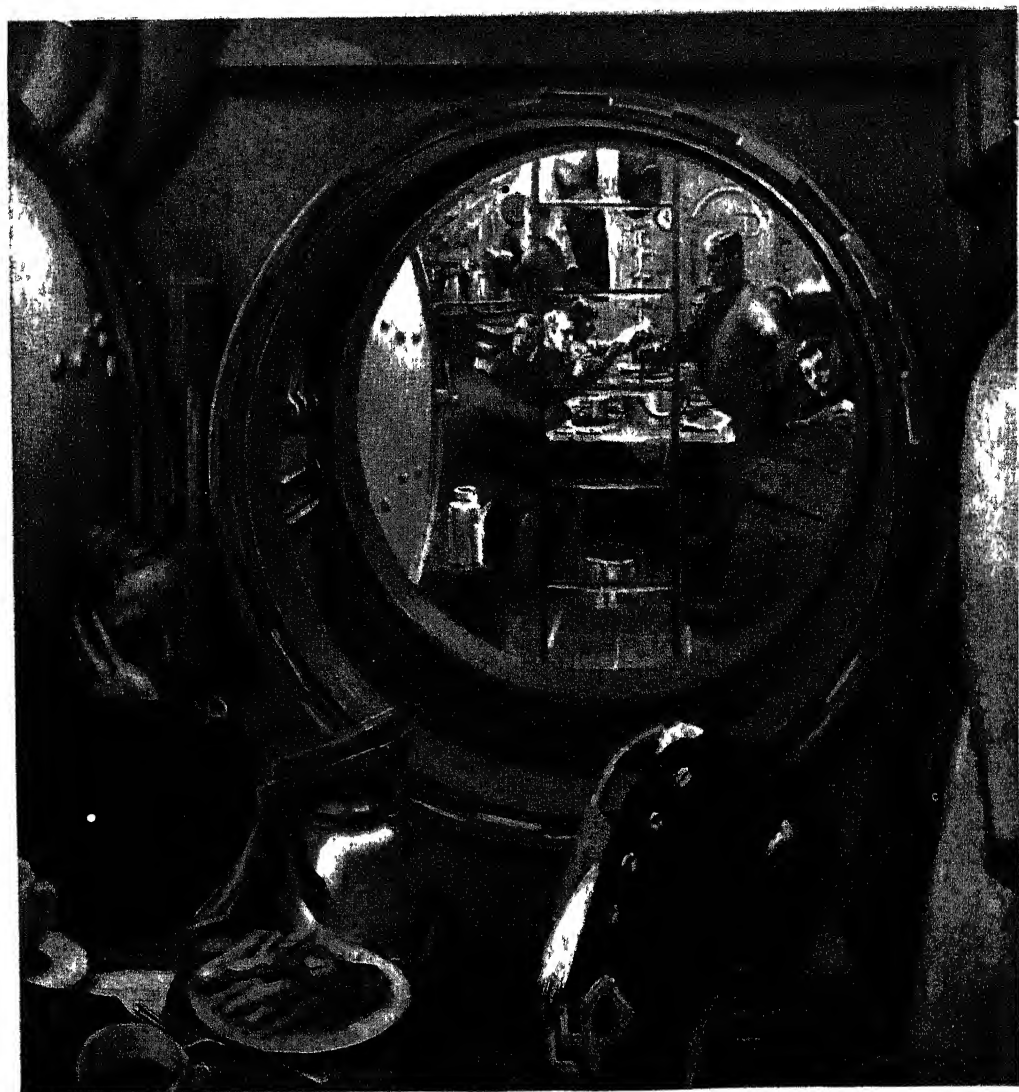


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# TEA ON SERVICE



STEPHEN BONE

*"S" Class Submarine*

*The wardroom of the forward mess-deck, seen through  
the Davis escape chamber*

# TEA ON SERVICE

## Part I

*Introduced by*

ADMIRAL LORD MOUNTEVANS

K.C.B., D.S.O., LL.D.



## Part II

*Introduced by*

LORD WOOLTON

P.C., G.H., D.L., LL.D., J.P.

THE TEA CENTRE

22 Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus

London

# Colour Plates

STEPHEN BONE: "S" Class Submarine

*Frontispiece*

The wardroom of the forward mess-deck, seen  
through the Davis escape chamber

*By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum*

*facing page*

ANTHONY GROSS: Liberation and Battle of France

28

Carrier Platoon of Green Howards near Longraye

*By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum*

RUSKIN SPEAR: W.V.S. Canteen at the Docks

60

*By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum*

HENRY M. CARR: All Clear

75

*By courtesy of the Empire Tea Bureau*

## Illustrations

This young lad served tea to evacuated troops from Dunkirk	Page 17
British Naval Divers enjoy a warming cup	18
Refreshing cups of tea for the "look-outs" during a lull in the bombing. Guns are always at instant readiness	22
Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery, with his tank crew, while driving Rommel out of Africa	
Mr. Churchill and Viscount Alanbrooke, then C.I.G.S., watching the Battle of the Rhine Crossing	26
<i>By courtesy of Fox Photo's Ltd.</i>	
With a Horsa glider in the background, airborne troops have fortifying cups of tea prior to emplaning. These men of the Airborne Divisions, tough, hardened fighters, performed some of the most heroic feats of the war	29
<i>By courtesy of The Associated Press Ltd.</i>	
Assault troops on the beaches of Normandy	30
<i>By courtesy of The New York Times</i>	
Australian troops sitting around their foxhole in New Guinea, preparing tea on a primus stove	31
<i>By courtesy of Commonwealth Department of Information</i>	
British soldiers in front of the ruined Reichstag in Berlin	33
A quick mug of tea before going on guard	35
Aircrews and ground staff have tea before the Lancaster takes off for another raid on Germany	38



## ILLUSTRATIONS

Back from a raid on Berlin. No interrogation complete without a cup of tea	Page 40
Cold work dismantling crashed German bombers	41
Sunderland patrols often lasted longer than fifteen hours. An air-gunner, acting cook, makes a cup of tea	43
Farmhouse H.Q. for the Home Guard. The sentry has his well-deserved "cuppa"	44
N.F.S. men welcome a break. Ceylon not only sent us tea—its people were most generous with funds for relief work <i>By courtesy of Fox Photo's Ltd.</i>	48
A café proprietor carries on in a blitzed side-street	49
A desperate fight to quench fires raging in Queen Victoria Street, St. Paul's	52
It's thirsty and tiring work dealing with fires	54
The mobile does its job while the guns blaze away at Nazi bombers in a night attack on London	55
For these men, no early morning cup of tea in bed	57
Victims of a flying bomb at Peckham <i>By courtesy of London News Agency</i>	58
What the N.F.S. had to contend with—a burning building crashes	59
An air-raid warden feeding tea to a family buried in a Morrison shelter <i>By courtesy of Keystone</i>	61
Gratitude to the Londoners' Meals Service in the eyes of this wounded child <i>By courtesy of London News Agency</i>	63

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Serving workers at a tea bar at a Royal Ordnance Factory	Page 64
Trolley service in an Ordnance Factory	66
<i>By courtesy of the Y.M.C.A.</i>	
The tea line—factory girls enjoy their break	71
<i>By courtesy of London News Agency</i>	
Tea-garden labour building roads in Assam	78
A typical view of the mountains on the Assam border	80
Naganis doing their bit in road-making	81
Dockers unloading tea from Colombo	86
<i>By courtesy of The Associated Press Ltd.</i>	
Lord Woolton approves the brew served to tube shelterers	88
<i>By courtesy of Fox Photo's Ltd.</i>	
American troops help gather in the harvest	90
<i>By courtesy of London News Agency</i>	
A blood donor gratefully drinks her tea	93

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THE TEA CENTRE, *January* 1947

# PART ONE

*Fighting Front and Home Front*



# Introduction

By ADMIRAL LORD MOUNTEVANS

K.C.B., D.S.O., LL.D.

*(Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London, 1939-1945)*

**I** SUPPOSE if I were confronted suddenly with the question, "What beverage would you choose, besides water, if you were only allowed one kind of drink for the rest of your life?" I should answer without hesitation, "Why, tea, of course."

Why tea? Why, because I could not live without it.

In the Antarctic, those never-to-be-forgotten sledge journeys, in one of which I nearly lost my life after foot-slogging more than seventeen hundred miles, were made possible only by tea-drinking. We had tea for our breakfast in those little green tents which for months became our homes. Then we struck camp, and after our five-hour forenoon march put up our lunch camp and looked forward more than anything else to the midday brew of tea. We had no milk, of course, but plenty of sugar, and one felt, in those terribly low temperatures, the tea running down, it seemed, right into one's toes. We had a light lunch of special sledging biscuits, about the size of dog-biscuits, but very much harder. They were fortified with from 13 per cent. to 18 per cent. of vegetable proteins, and with two large aluminium mugs full of tea per man we faced the afternoon march like giants refreshed.

All our best marches were done on tea, and throughout my adventurous life I have been an addict of tea. I worship it. I always carry a St. Christopher, and I note that the centre letter of his name is the first letter of "tea." It ought to be a capital "T," which would serve as an indicator to the traveller on land, at sea or in the air, the beverage that is best for him or her.

I owe my affection and dependence on tea to the people of lovely New Zealand, who first induced me to drink "morning tea" about eleven o'clock, and I attribute my boundless appetite for mental or physical work to that guardian angel tea.

## TEA ON SERVICE

What a rich man I should be if I had a pound sterling or even a shilling for every cup of tea that I have enjoyed. I should be a millionaire in pounds or shillings. I have only fallen out with one cup of tea. It was brought to me by my coxswain on the bridge of a destroyer during a really bad gale. He had stuck the spoon in the tea to keep some of it from slopping over, and it was real sailor's tea! So strong that the spoon nearly stood up in it. I took the first mouthful, and it was so bitter that when I finished the cup I felt sick, and was sick. The only time I have been sea-sick or tea-sick in my life!

Tea is supposed to be the favourite drink of the privileged sex, but in this last Great World War, believe me, men became tea-drinkers in all our services, especially in Civil Defence. It gave us courage and that matey feeling which gets the best effort out of us to help our fellow-humans. In presenting this book I would like to repay part of the great debt we owe to the mobile canteen staffs—W.V.S. and others. I do not wish to forget one terrible night, December 29, 1940, when the city was ablaze. Crossing London Bridge at midnight and feeling really frightened, I thought I must show a little sang-froid, if only to prove to my lady driver, Mrs. Dunne, wife of the Police Court Magistrate, that I was shivering from cold instead of fear. So I stopped the car, got out and had a look around. Fires were burning fiercely, and the whole sky to the northward, the east and the south was an orange-red glow. The dome of St. Paul's stood out, boldly silhouetted against the flame-red skies which, reflected in the river, made old Father Thames look quite beautiful, when the city was in its anguish. There was no sound except that of the bombs falling, the boom of the anti-aircraft guns and the dingle-dangle-dingle-dangle-ding of the firebells as the pumps were rushed to the conflagration. I looked at my driver and said, in as brave a tone as I could command, "London by firelight! Get out and have a look."

Just then a mobile canteen came lumbering over the bridge. It stopped abreast my car, and in it were three W.V.S. canteen workers going about their abnormal duty as unconcerned and unafraid as though they were going shopping. One of the women kindly shouted out, "Will you have a cup of tea, police-inspector?" "Thank you very much," I replied. "May we have two?" We did, and for my part that cup of tea was the best I have had in my life.

## *Tea and the Navy in War*

“I SAY,” said Mr. Salteena excitedly, “I have had some tea in bed.” Readers of that ingenuous masterpiece, *The Young Visitors*, will probably agree that this must surely have been the peak moment of Mr. Salteena’s hitherto very dull existence. It would not appear from what we are told of his private affairs that he had experienced before all the beatitude and balm that there is in an early morning cup of tea. I imagine that he rolled over in his luxurious bed, and perhaps watched Horace the footman pour the beverage from a silver teapot and add quantities of cream and sugar. And then he drank and wallowed about, blinking at the sunlight, savouring the moment to the full. No wonder he got into a “mouve dressing gown with yellaw tassles.”

But where I see an artistic flaw in the picture is in the fact that the tea was brought by Horace the footman. Because, just as there is a ritual in the drinking of beer and other alcoholic jorums—a faddiness about whether you drink out of pewter or delf or cut-glass, and the exchange of such incantations as “Bung-O” or “Skin off your nose”—so there is a ritual proper to the morning cup of tea. And of it I would say this: that it should be brought to the bedside by a feminine bearer, because the making of tea is properly a womanly function and one of the great privileges and mysteries of their sex.

And, further, I would ask that this womanly creature should enter the room smiling. Or anyhow, when you, the recipient of the tea, open your eyes, it would appear to you that she smiles. This is my chief quarrel with Horace. I have a feeling that he was too grand to smile; especially as Mr. Salteena addressed him as “my man.”

To insist still further is perhaps to enter the realms of fantasy, but I would, God help me, have my Hebe not only smiling but pretty. And then, given an agreeable tea-set with a cup of adequate size, and a pot that refrains from dribbling into the saucer when it pours out—perhaps, although I will not insist on it, a piece of bread and butter of wafer thinness—then that cup of tea has achieved the almost impossible ideal. It is the time and the place and the loved one all together. It is as Mother made it.



## TEA ON SERVICE

I am coming to the Navy in a moment.

At that period of the war known in London as the First Blitz, I found myself on the roof of a high building during the nightly raids. I should like to claim that I went there at the call of duty; actually I chose this post of eminence because I was too great a coward to stay in the communal shelter in the basement, where there was the divertisement of a gramophone and fleas. I saw all there was to be seen of falling bombs and blazing buildings, and I was armed with a little axe. At times I wondered vaguely, up there under the roaring flaming skies, what I was expected to do with a little axe, and in what conceivable set of circumstances it and I would become operative. But mostly I wondered when I could forsake my post and get a cup of tea from the canteen.

The point about all those blitzes is that sooner or later sleep—untroubled by noises and the imminent fear of death—became the most desirable thing in all the universe. Not just to me but to millions. And there came a time when the more fortunate inhabitants of the country invited the sleepyheads from London to come and spend a night or two away from the racket; sometimes they invited friends, and sometimes, to their everlasting credit, they took strangers; and in this way I found myself awakened one morning, after ten hours' soundless stupor, by a housemaid with a tea-tray.

The sunshine poured in through the windows, bringing earthy scents with it; robins were whistling; the little maid smiled good morning, and she was as pretty as a picture.

Now, I have recorded all this partly because it was—as Mr. Salteena's was—my peak moment as far as cups of tea go. But lying there in that nice chintzy room, revelling in the peace of the country and sipping my tea, I wondered why Hitler had not taken steps to prevent tea from reaching Great Britain. Because if he could have done that, I had a feeling that he would have won the war. Through all the horrors of successive blitzes, it had been to millions the complete anodyne; a comfort in the shelters, it had become almost the elixir of life to the Civil Defence, Police and Fire Services above ground. And not only to this great unselfish Civilian Army, but to the survivors of "incidents" as they were called. Could they have "taken it" without a cup of tea at the rest centre? It was the mainspring of our morale.

And, musing along this line of thought, I realised that with

## TEA AND THE NAVY IN WAR

unrestricted submarine warfare, aerial attack on convoys, the mining of our ports and waterways with magnetic, acoustic and contact mines, Hitler was, in fact, doing his best to prevent, amongst other necessities, the flow of tea into Great Britain. And the Navy, the Royal and Merchant Navies, were doing their best to meet the violence and malevolence of the enemy with a good deal of violence and malevolence of their own. The resultant struggle came to be called, for want of a better name, the Battle of the Atlantic.

Lying there that morning, I thought of it as the battle for my tea.

To do it justice, I don't think the Navy thought about it as the battle of anything specific. It was just war. I don't imagine it entered the Navy's hundreds of thousands of tin-hatted or balaclava-helmeted heads that the day's "cuppa"—or rather the "cuppa" of the day after to-morrow—was in any jeopardy. Because the Navy takes tea as much for granted, and finds it as necessary to its existence, as the land-lubber takes Sea Power for granted or the oxygen he breathes.

The war as the sailor saw it was a damnably uncomfortable,

*This young lad served tea to evacuated troops from Dunkirk*





*British Naval Divers enjoy a warming cup*

## TEA AND THE NAVY IN WAR

unpleasant business that had to be won as soon as possible, so that everybody, except the professionals, could go ashore and become civilians again. There must be an end to cold and wet and fatigue, to being torpedoed and bombed, to irksome discipline and monotony, to the fear of death, to everlasting unadulterated male society, to seasickness and overcrowding and anxiety about the bombed folks at home. And to bring this about the sailor worked and fought hard enough; but had anyone suggested that mixed up with this filthy and unnecessary business of war was a direct and imminent threat to deprive him of his cup of tea, he would have gone berserk. Take away the rum and about a third of any ship's company would be very unhappy. But deprive them of "char" and the stuffing would be knocked out of everybody. And as for the Wrens . . . ' Hell hath no fury like a Wren cut off from her elevenses.

All items that comprise the sailor's diet afloat and ashore are, and always have been, rationed to a strict scale. But after the outbreak of war someone with great power and psychological insight—presumably Mr. Churchill, as he was then First Lord of the Admiralty—decreed that one item of the Naval scale of victualling should, for the first time in history, be issued to ships afloat without restriction on quantity. That item was tea. It was, as I see it, one of the country's greatest generosityes to her fighting sons afloat—this acquiescence in a meagre ration ashore so that all over the Seven Seas there was always a "cuppa" on demand. At the period of our maximum effort afloat, round about "D" Day, the Navy was consuming four thousand tons—tons, mark you!—per annum.

It was a lot of tea, but it was also quite a navy.

It was recently my privilege to meet the Admiralty official responsible for the sampling and purchase of tea for the Navy. Now, one of the reasons I am writing this article is because I like tea, and it has come as near to saving my life as anything in the war. But he had forgotten more about tea than I shall ever know. His office was in a requisitioned block of Edwardian London flats, and I sat near the window from where I watched the evening sun touch the autumnal leaves of the London plane trees below, while he revealed something of his knowledge of tea in all its aspects, and told me of the elaborate measures taken to blend and test the Navy's tea so as to ensure that it was, so far

## TEA ON SERVICE

as it is possible to gauge the composite palate of the Navy, just what the Navy wanted. And while he talked, my mind spanned a great gulf of years back to the time when I was a midshipman; when cocoa was the principal beverage in the Navy, and tea was in the nature of a folderol. Those old-time sailors' nervous systems were untaxed by the internal-combustion engine and a mechanised age their descendants were to accept as life. Their sons' and grandsons' addiction to tea seems to be a psychological need that has gradually increased with the tempo of living and with the strain of successive wars.

There pass before me, in retrospect, an endless succession of cups, mugs, basins, "fannys," cigarette-tins even, of tea drunk afloat during what I like to think is the last war I shall take part in. Quite early in the proceedings I was on board an escort sloop on the flank of a convoy proceeding sedately down the East Coast of England. We had been shadowed all day by enemy aircraft, and ships were at the first degree of readiness, which meant that all the guns' crews were closed up round their weapons and everybody was at their action stations. At intervals one of the escorts loosed off at the Peeping Toms that kept appearing and disappearing in far-off clouds. Up till then no convoy had been attacked by enemy aircraft. We were pioneers along what was to be the seaman's *via dolorosa*.

The ship's cook suddenly appeared on the bridge, wearing a shrapnel helmet on the back of his head. He appeared to be indifferent to the imminent aerial attack. His concern was with the dinner spoiling on the hot-plates. Eight bells had struck and nobody had piped "hands to dinner." Nobody except the cook had even thought of dinner or had the faintest idea of the time. We were new to war then and were all of a twitter with the excitement of the thing. The cook saluted the Captain. "Dinner's spoilin', sir," he announced. "Dinner?" murmured the Captain vaguely, his glasses on the shellbursts in the cloud valleys.

"Spoilin'," echoed the cook dismally. Everybody suddenly realised how hungry they were. The Captain lowered his glasses and peered into the cook's face.

"Sandwiches," he exclaimed, enunciating the words very clearly and rather loudly, as if speaking to a foreigner—"Sandwiches! can you make sandwiches? Hundreds of them—you know, corned beef. Very

## TEA AND THE NAVY IN WAR

well. And tea. Lots of hot tea." He resumed his scrutiny of the clouds. Radar was unheard of. We depended on our eyesight and our hearing to warn us against the approach of aircraft in those days. The cook, his face completely expressionless within the halo-like effect of his shrapnel helmet, retired backwards down the ladder. Beyond him the sea was grey like pewter with pools of brilliance against which the convoy stood out very black—ships of all sizes, their smoke trailing landward.

And then there were shouts from the look-outs and the thing happened, an event so new, so unbelievable, that I was invited to broadcast a description of it next day when I landed. I found a copy of the script recently; already the paper is yellowing with age. I quote a few lines, because they describe the first aerial attack ever made on a convoy. It might almost be a mediæval chronicle.

"Our foremost guns opened fire with a roar that drowned everything. Yellow flashes sprang out, obliterating the shapes of the German bombers swooping low over the convoy. The sea leaped up in columns where a few bombs dropped. The surface of the water spurted under the machine-gun bullets; orders were shouted through the din of firing; through smoke and gun-flashes and the ship shuddering from the recoil. Suddenly it was over. The enemy had vanished into the mist. No ship had been hit; nobody was hurt. The cook suddenly appears with a kettle of hot, sweet tea. He has resigned himself to his dinners being spoilt and looks happier. The tea is handed out in thick mugs. O blessed tea!"

Poor stuff as I read it now, but the point of it is that when, as was to be the case all through the war, the moment the fighting was over the thought uppermost in everybody's mind was tea.

Sometimes tea and fighting coincided. Somewhere off Narvik I was a passenger in a destroyer when we were trying to prevent the Germans from invading Norway. The destroyer was one of the screen ahead of our battle fleet, and all one long afternoon—it seemed interminable although it got dark quite early—we beat off with gunfire a high-level bombing attack. The enemy 'planes were browning us from an immense altitude, so high that they were almost invisible. The falling bombs were, on the other hand, plainly to be seen.

From the compass platform the Captain of this destroyer judged the angle of their descent by eye and dodged them by altering speed





## TEA AND THE NAVY IN WAR

rather than helm. It was a technique peculiarly his own, and is perhaps one reason why he finished the war with a C.B. and, I think, two bars to his D.S.O. Anyhow, after a couple of hours of this pastime he turned to a messenger and bade him tell his steward he wanted some tea. Did I want any? I said I did. I never wanted anything so much in my life. Very well. Tea for two—STOP BOTH ENGINES!

Now, I was in a sense the Captain's guest, and his steward had perfectly good ideas about entertaining company. He appeared presently with a silver-plated tea-tray, teapot, milk jug and sugar basin to match "Sets, tea, silver-plated, Captains, for the use of," is, I suppose, how it was described in the victualling account. Delicate fluted cups and saucers accompanied it, and the crowning refinement of thin bread and butter. The steward laid the tray on the chart table as a stick of bombs burst some cables away on the beam. "How d'you like it?" asked the Captain. The foremost guns fired and their breath swept the compass platform like a furnace. "Milk and sugar?"

"No sugar, thanks."

The steward handed me my cup. I tried to play up to it all for his benefit. I could think of no other way than to cock my little finger as I drank.

There is an authentic story of a motor torpedo-boat that had her stern blown off by a mine one night off the enemy's coast. Another boat of the flotilla ranged alongside in the darkness and took off survivors, but before abandoning his ship the lieutenant in command climbed forward up the steeply sloping upper-deck—she was sinking fast, stern first—to see that there were no injured men left on board. Crawling down into the mess-deck he found a sailor lying on the settee bunk; inside the tiny galley a muffled figure was holding a kettle on to the badly listed stove. "What the hell——?" he began.

"It's only Smith, sir," replied the muffled figure. "'E ain't feeling too good, and I was just brewing 'im a cuppa."

They were chased up on deck, and stepped off on to the other boat as their own sank.

In a ship of the line tea is available before the hands start work in the morning, continuously till breakfast, at stand-easy in the middle of the forenoon, often during the dinner hour, again during the afternoon stand-easy, at tea-time, at supper, and normally the last thing between



## TEA ON SERVICE

supper and "pipe down." Moreover, wherever in the nature of their duties two or three habitually gather together in offices, workshops and ready-use stores tucked away in the bowels of the ship, there at the accepted hour for a "cuppa" you will find it if you are a visitor just then and, provided you don't insist on any nonsense about a clean cup, you will, regardless of your rank, be made welcome to the circle.

It is something that has become an integral part of life afloat, this promiscuous, charlady-like, gossipy, comforting supping of tea. It affords another friendly link between officers and men; things that momentarily seem unendurable in the arduous abnormal life of men in ships at sea take their right place, after a "cuppa," in the eternal scale of values. A grievance that alcohol would turn into a searing ulcer vanishes in the steam of the teapot. And if the essential element of tea-brewing, the woman's touch, is lacking afloat, every time the sailor brews it for himself it may be that its fragrance reminds him of someone who would do it better, and awaits him at the journey's end.

RICHARD DIMBLEBY

## *That Weapon—Tea*

*(The author points out that he has never before written in praise of any one commodity. He adds, "One thing only persuaded me to write this story. That is the simple fact that tea has played a major part in the war, as the comforter of the weary, the supporter of the weak, and the protector of the cold. I have seen it in all these rôles; I know it is true.")*

A WEEK or two ago I was sitting in a London flat, discussing the war with a group of friends. Among them was an Army nurse on leave from a base hospital who had spent three years in the Middle East, one of them at the height of the fighting when we first clashed with Rommel. We were swapping reminiscences of the desert campaign and, more particularly, of the great speed-up in medical treatment of the wounded that so reduced our casualties.

The nurse told me that very few of the patients realised that they had been badly wounded, and that shock, a merciful injury, numbed their nerves like a drug, so that often they felt no pain. "They were incredibly cheerful," she said. "I take off my hat to the boys we had through our ward; they never grumbled or moaned. If they were well enough to talk, they joked."

I asked her how they reacted to the presence of nurses so far forward in the desert. She smiled. "I think they were quite pleased," she said, "but they didn't say much, except to ask for a cup of tea. That was always the first thing."

She went on talking about treatment, but for a moment I lost the thread of what she was saying. That reference to tea had jogged my memory; somewhere, sometime, I'd seen tea and doctors together. Then I remembered, and as I remembered the whole picture came tumbling back into my mind.

It was a hot evening in 1942, when the Eighth Army, after its thrust down to Agedabia on the road to Tripoli, had been punched hard on the nose by Rommel's armour and was reeling back. We war



*(Top) Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery, with his tank crew, while driving Rommel out of Africa*

*(Bottom) Mr. Churchill and Viscount Alanbrooke, then C.I.G.S., watching the Battle of the Rhine Crossing*



## THAT WEAPON—TEA

correspondents had been living in close touch with the units at the front and with Battle Headquarters behind, and we suspected that things were going badly wrong. As the days passed, we fell back to the Gazala line, and then, to our dismay, General Koenig's French troops had to withdraw after a brave stand at Bir Hacheim, and the Gazala line was no more.

Everything was crumbling. I drove hundreds of miles, trying to maintain contact between the ever-moving Brigade Headquarters and Battle Headquarters on the coast. Trying, in fact, to avoid letting down this gallant and hard-pressed army, while supplying accurate reports on the situation to the millions of people listening to B.B.C. news bulletins all over the world. It was not an easy nor a pleasant job, and I found it exhausting.

On this particular evening—one of those desert evenings when the going down of the sun seemed to bring no relief from the heat blowing up in gusts on the south wind—I was driving back from a tank unit when I came across a collection of tents and trucks in the open desert. From the red crosses displayed on the ground, I could see it was a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance, but I had not expected to find one so near the battle. It was perhaps six miles from the enemy, lying out in the dusk across the open desert.

Behind us as we drove through the scrub towards the tents there was a continuous flickering and glaring in the sky, as though on the horizon someone was staging a great fireworks display. There was the rumbling and clanging of battle, and the noise like an iron door being slammed in the sky which meant that bombs were falling. I thought that in the last hour the noise and the light had come nearer—the battle was moving our way, and was already much too close for the safety of this hospital in the field. I knew from experience, however, that nothing would move the doctors while they were on the job. More than once before a field hospital had been captured, freed and captured again in a single day without stopping work.

I saw in the middle of the encampment one large square tent outside which a dark motionless line of men trailed along the canvas. Some were standing, but most of them sat or lay on the stony ground, silent and shadowy as ghosts. Knowing this was the operating theatre, I pushed apart the double tent flaps and went into a blaze of light. It

## TEA ON SERVICE

came from two pressure burners hanging under a reflector made of petrol tins. Under them, dark against the white of sheets, towels and the sterilised gleam of aluminium, was the sunburned body of a soldier. Two doctors bent over him, one at his head, one patting a thick dressing into place over his chest.

I stood for a moment by the entrance, fearful of bringing too much sand and dirt into this spotless interior. Then one of the surgeons straightened his back with the slow movement of a man who was very tired. Two orderlies slid the wounded man off the table and carried him away. At that moment the chief surgeon peeled off his red rubber gloves and face mask, and saw me across the tent. I recognised him as a New Zealander whom I'd met before.

"Hullo—funny place to meet you," he grinned. "Come back to the fleshpots?" He turned to the others. "All right, let's break off for five minutes. Get some tea, Sampson." The orderly vanished through a flap, and the second doctor, skinning off gloves and mask, revealed himself as another young and tired man.

The New Zealander led me from the tent. As we went outside there was a flash and a shell burst a few hundred yards to the north-west of us. The surgeon grimaced. "That's getting much too near, but I'll be damned if they can spoil my rest." He sat on the ground, and taking a cigarette from a trousers pocket, lit it with a match carefully shielded in one hand.

"Busy?" I asked.

"*Busy!*" he said. "That's the thirty-sixth operation running, and no easy one either. I can do so much, you know, but after that I get frightened of a shaky hand and lay off for a bit. Not long though. Look at this lot," pointing to the silent queue which, by the arrival of another ambulance, had grown even longer. The orderly came up with two mugs, gave one to the surgeon and one to me. There we stood, as the explosions of shells came slowly nearer, creeping over the desert. I dare say that tea was made in quite the wrong way—too strong, too sweet, too hot—but to us it was nectar, to the surgeon because he was exhausted, to me because I was dirty and tired and worried to death by the battle situation. Soon afterwards, the doctor went back to his tent and I went on my way, leaving the queue as silent as ever, but sipping the same sweet, scalding drink.



ANTHONY GROSS: LIBERATION AND BATTLE OF FRANCE  
*Carrier Platoon of Green Howards near Lonsgrave*





*With a Horsa glider in the background, airborne troops have fortifying cups of tea prior to emplaning. These men of the Airborne Divisions, tough, hardened fighters, performed some of the most heroic feats of the war*

I suppose that nowhere in the world have the rules of tea-making been so far broken as they were in the desert—indeed, anywhere in the Middle East. No one bothered about heating the pot or letting it stand. Sometimes there was no pot. Indeed, as often as not the tea, sugar and condensed milk were thrown into the dixie and stirred up together. The result was thick, brown and full of leaves, but it was drunk with appreciation at a thousand places every night from Persia to Libya. I was thinking the other day of all the odd spots in which I had seen it brewed, ranging from the lee of a tank resting in laager after battle to the footplate of a British locomotive hauling supplies through the mountains of Iran, and ranging in time from the icy dawn at five thousand feet to the blazing afternoon heat at sea-level or below. In the cold, it warmed you; in the heat, it seemed to cool.



## TEA ON SERVICE

Of course, there were times when the Middle East armies had tea in the more proper manner. One of the most popular vehicles was the tea-van, swaying along the road on its way to a camp, hospital or aerodrome, or perhaps parked in a suitable spot out of sight of the enemy, delivering hundreds of cups of tea to troops who had not expected it. I never saw anyone refuse. These tea-vans would have made an odd parade if assembled together; I remember the Y.M.C.A., the red shield of the Salvation Army, the Quakers, the N.A.A.F.I., the W.V.S., the Church Army, and the "Kumangatit" (this is a special desert variety provided by an excellent fund in Cairo). Probably I've left someone out, and if so, may I be forgiven, but there was a great selection, and you could not go far on any front without coming across a tea-van with the flap down and male or female hands passing out mugs on a human endless-belt system as fast as they could go. And,

*Assault troops on the beaches of Normandy*



## THAT WEAPON—TEA

after all, who cared what the name on the side was—it was still a cup of tea that came out.

A colleague of mine with whom I shared food and canvas in the desert, and who specialised in writing descriptive stories with “the human angle,” once turned to me despairingly from his typewriter and said, “Every time I write a story, there’s always tea in it; why don’t I hire myself to the tea people as an agent?” He might well have done so, but the frequent mention of tea in his accounts of life in the desert was inevitable. No story of a day in the life of a man serving in any theatre of war would have been complete, or even accurate, unless the brewing of tea had come into it somewhere. The tougher the circumstances, the more important the tea; and the more difficult it was to prepare, the more sure it was to appear.

To many of us, I believe, it became more than just a warming

*Australian troops sitting around their foxhole in New Guinea  
preparing tea on a primus stove*



## TEA ON SERVICE

drink. It was the outward mark of security and comfort when these qualities were sadly lacking. When a crisis was approaching, tea would be handed round, possibly laced with something a little extra; when the crisis was over, someone would produce cups of tea to soothe the nerves and relax the tension. Whenever things were at their gloomiest, some thoughtful soul would say, "Here, have a cup of char, it'll make you feel better." Without the shadow of a doubt, it always did.

I have always been a poor diarist, lacking the time and the patience to set down an account of the day's doings each night. Faced twice with the need to write books which were, by their nature, expanded diaries, I relied on my memory and a pile of old broadcast texts to reconstruct my movements and experiences from 1940 to 1944. I found that certain important phases of the war were marked by mental milestones, each of them a small incident or object. One of these was a cup of tea, savoured and drunk in a lonely place at a very critical time.

In the winter of 1940 I was ordered from Turkey to Greece, which had just been attacked by Italy. Two friends and I travelled from Istanbul to Athens in an unheated compartment of a troop train, keeping ourselves alive and unfrozen for five days by repeated doses of biscuits, meat-paste and tea, brewed over a spirit stove on the floor. In Athens we fitted out an expedition for the front, which was then 400 miles off across the mountains in Albania. The three of us decided to travel together in a huge old touring car, once owned by Venizelos. We had amassed a quantity of rugs and blankets, tins of food, petrol and spare tyres, and, when we finally left Athens, we looked more like a transcontinental expedition than three war correspondents about to continue their usual duties on a new front.

But we had been warned to expect bitter cold, blizzards and icy precipices, and roads worse for driving than any other highways in Europe. All these conditions we found, and after the hot, flat desert it was a violent change. It took us nearly a week to reach the front, and even then we had to spend hours driving forward in pursuit of the Italians, who were being chased with enthusiasm by the brave little Greek Army. At last we drove into a little mountain village called Boboschitza, and there, taking a rude track, bumped and slid our way to a Greek outpost.



## TEA ON SERVICE

This was simply a half-ruined hut lying on a slope and ill-protected against the devastating blasts of the wind by a line of scraggy olive-trees. There was deep snow upon the ground, snow in which the Greek patrol had worn a slippery path leading to the hut. Inside we found half a dozen Evzones, troops of the Royal Guard who in normal times would have been parading in Athens in their white skirts and red slippers. Now they lay bedded in a heap of soiled straw with their thin greatcoats drawn close round them.

They were surprised to see us. There were not more than six or eight individuals dressed as British officers on the whole Greek front at that early stage of the war, and certainly they had not expected the British to turn up in this desolate hut at eleven o'clock at night. The Greeks are hospitable people, and these men were distressed because they had nothing to offer us. They did, in fact, proffer a loaf of dark, hard bread, their sole ration for the next day. Apart from this, they had only the snow, to crumble and swallow as liquid. The only luxury, they told us, was an occasional handful of olives eaten with the bread.

Obviously it was up to us to produce something. But our own store was dwindling, and we had a week's travel between us and Athens; there was nothing to be bought in between. However, we opened three tins of sardines to eat with the bread, and Arthur, whose spirit stove had performed such service on the long train journey into Greece, now fetched it from his wicker hamper. David brought condensed milk, sugar and the precious tin of tea. The Evzones watched as the stove roared and spurted, brightening the dismal room and spreading at least an illusion of warmth. Then Arthur arranged his teapot, spoon and strainer carefully on the lid of the hamper. He was a stickler for making tea in the right way, and greatly mystified the Greeks by pouring boiling water into the pot, swilling it round and pouring it away again.

At last the steaming cups, our total of three, were handed round. The sardines quickly disappeared, and we settled ourselves on the straw, puffing at cigarettes and taking turns at sipping tea. Then, as never before, I saw its warming, thawing properties and its power of creating ease and friendship. Under its influence, the Evzones began talking of the war and of their homes.

It had not taken us long when we first arrived in Greece to realise

## THAT WEAPON—TEA

that we were to see a war fought with a bitterness and intensity born of the purest motive—the defence of a native land. In this hut on the mountain we heard the creed that bound all Greeks together to fight and perhaps to die. For they knew the struggle was hopeless. Of their ability to defeat the Italians, although the enemy was five times stronger in men and weapons, they had no doubt, and I saw with my own eyes that they were doing this. But behind their assurance lay the realisation that, sooner or later, Germany would intervene. And that, for an army poorly fed, badly dressed and terribly lacking in equipment, would be another story.

These things we talked about. They asked us if a British Army was coming from Egypt, and because we were then ignorant of General Wavell's plan, we were cautious in our reply. The Evzone sergeant in charge of the party said simply, "If you will help us, we'll do our best."

*A quick mug of tea before going on guard*



## TEA ON SERVICE

Then he lifted his cup of tea as though it were a glass of precious wine and offered a toast to our friendship. "Greece and Britain together he said. "We're good enough for the others." And drained the cup dry.

A hundred memories have come into my head since I began preparing this story of tea on the battle front, but none more vivid than that of the toast in tea drunk by that brave man five years ago. He and his country disappeared into the shadows, but in the end we were good enough together.

FIELD CRAFT IN CONCEALING THEMSELVES.

THE MAJOR SPOKE HIGHLY OF THE WORK OF THE PROVOST STAFF WHO WORKING IN THE MINE FIELDS ERECTED DIVISIONAL SIGNS FOR DIRECTION OF TRAFFIC.

12.59.PM.

ADD. ROMMEL.

" OUR RECOVERY TROOPS ALSO DID WELL. IT WAS QUITE COMMON FOR THE CREW OF A DAMAGED TANK TO RETURN THE SAME NIGHT WITH THEIR TANK READY TO FIGHT AGAIN.

TEA PLAYS A BIG PART IN THE DESERT FIGHTING.

" LET'S HAVE A BREW" IS A GREAT EXPRESSION IN THE DESERT. WHEN A HALT OF TWENTY MINUTES IS CALLED CREWS CLAMBER FROM VEHICLES, A HOLE IS DUG IN THE GROUND A TWIG FIRE IS LIT AND WITHIN TEN MINUTES WATER IS BOILING IN AN OLD PETROL TIN. TEA SUGAR AND MILK ARE ADDED AND THE BREW IS READY WITHIN 15 MINUTES.

1.2.PM.

COMMONS . - ADD. JEWS IN EUROPE.

MR SILVERMAN ASKED IF THE PHRASE ' THOSE RESPONSIBLE' WAS TO BE UNDERSTOOD TO MEAN ONLY THOSE WHO GAVE ORDERS , OR

JOHN PUDNEY

## *The Royal Air Force*

“TEA!” said madame. “The tea I have saved.”

It was tea, certainly, in the most dainty porcelain coffee cups. It reached the table with a flourish. It stood, poured out, prim, rather unreal, upon the best lace table-cloth.

“My God,” cried madame in a tragic voice. “I did forget to warm the pot. Forgive me, messieurs, it is the excitement of the liberation. The tea is not good.”

It was not good tea; but it was symbolic. That brew, so hastily, tearfully, patriotically prepared by the French lady upon the occasion of her first seeing British uniforms was the very broth of freedom. It could hardly be good. There was nothing special about it, in the first place, except the English words upon the wrapping. But then it had been hidden under the bed, buried in the garden in a tin, and latterly, with the advances of the Allies through France, it had been kept in readiness behind the illustrated encyclopædia in the bookcase. Of course it was not good tea, for the pot was not warmed and there were tears in it. Finally madame ruined it by impulsively adding some very strong liquor indeed to the pale-brown, lukewarm but still symbolic offering. She raised her cup on high in a toast to the R.A.F. “Avec boom, boom, boom . . .”

That I think was the happiest recollection I have of taking tea while on war service in the R.A.F. It happened in a street off the Boulevard St. Michel in Paris on the afternoon of the entry of the liberating troops of General Leclerc, with whom I had the privilege to be travelling.

It was, I repeat, not good tea; but quality is not by any means a criterion by which the enjoyment of a war-time cup of tea can be judged in retrospect. Ingredients, such as the company and circumstances in which it was drunk, engrave themselves upon the memory.

If the most symbolic cup of tea came to me in liberated Paris, the most tantalising, frustrated cups must have been those for which we sprinted and pushed and queued in the brief intervals from





*Aircrews and ground staff have tea before the Lancaster takes off for another raid on Germany*

## THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

square-bashing when I first joined up. Blustering winds and sleet accompanied the sergeant's witticisms; relentless asphalt beneath our tender feet underlined the wisdom of all those remarks which began "when you have been in the R.A.F. as long as I have . . ."

Tea represented the only link with reality, the only solace in that weather, the only reinforcement against the sergeant's eye. But, alas, we were many and the intervals were brief—being long enough only to enable our experienced mentor to regain his breath—and finally the tea was hot. One sip of comfort in that draughty purgatory furred the anxious tongue. How tea was ever got so hot is one of the unsolved mysteries of R.A.F. training. How the sergeant always managed to drink his to the last drop while we rookies still gasped after a few sips is a matter fortunately of no concern to most of us now but one about which we had embittered theories at the time. It takes more than scalding tea to give a man a voice like that; but it was the frustration of falling in and leaving behind us scalding tea that really brought it home to us that we had left home.

After every operational flight in Britain, after the great raids, the long convoy escorts, the fighter sweeps, the attacks on those special Gestapo targets, the first contact with home—for those who came back—was tea. The cup of tea and the cigarette played a vital part in every crew interrogation. The first intelligence flashes of every great air-force event were always brewed over tea. On certain occasions, but by no means as a matter of course, I have known an infusion of rum to enliven it; but the tea was a matter of course, the cordial, sweet necessary comfort, the humble undramatic celebration of the safe return, the humdrum symbol of being back. Not good tea, mind you, only a distant cousin of that elegant Drawing-room tea, wet and warm, homely in a chipped cup, gratefully snatched up, absent-mindedly swilled down.

I was once the guest of another service, the Royal Navy, in a mine-layer: and the one or two points in common which I noticed included the tension which grows before an operation—in this case the skilful and exact laying of the mines—and the ebullient relief when the job is safely done. Both before and after, I observed gratefully, as in the R.A.F., we were comforted by tea. A thick, sweet, adequate brew appeared from nowhere just before the ship went into action, and

## TEA ON SERVICE

afterwards on the way home there was that leisurely discursive tea-taking, among the watch off-duty, in the course of which family photographs are inevitably shown round.

Most of my own recollections of R.A.F. tea are connected with odd parts of the world overseas. In times of war that good advice to do as Rome does—and drink, of course, what Rome drinks—must be largely ignored. Wherever one went, one did as the air force did and air-force rations permit tea-drinking on the scale of one pint each for breakfast, dinner and tea (with the N.A.A.F.I. for between times). Wherever there were aircraft and fuel to put in them, there also was tea and men to put it in. What a diversity of tea drinkings come to mind!

Ikeja, the airfield which was hacked out of Nigerian bush. The control and operations room a Hurricane packing-case. Convoys of fighters taking off in a pink cloud of laterite dust to fly across Africa and take part in the victory of El Alamein. West Africa steamed that afternoon and Willy, who had just taken command of the posting station, murmured deprecatingly about a "white man's grave." We went to see the station's private orange grove, and we reached what seemed the ultimate of heat while we inspected the station ovens which were for some reason Willy's pride. Then said he, "A little tea will cool us down," and we consumed a set tea which, but for the fresh fruit, would

*Back from a raid on Berlin. No interrogation complete without a cup of tea*



## THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

have been regarded as a certainty for keeping the cold out in an English rectory.

The four thousand-odd miles across Africa was in those days (1942) just one cup after another. But the most gentlemanly one was without doubt upon the terrace of the Grand Hotel in Kitchener's Khartoum. Here, in the smooth shade close to the silent confluence of the two Niles, tea was ritual. To have tea in the midst of Africa in this town actually laid out in the shape of a Union Jack was as seemly and as inevitable as tea on a bland afternoon in the Royal Borough of Windsor against the silent affluence of the one and only Thames.

A further stage of that same journey brought me to a memorable taking of tea. One which I mention because it reflects nothing but credit to my hostess and because it was so characteristic of the time and place. The place was Malta, at a time when the long siege had just been raised and the victory of El Alamein had been won. Bare necessities and essential war materials had got through to the island. In the scarred, dusty air-force camps at Luqa, Halfar and Takali we were still on short rations, but starvation was still very near to the civilian inhabitants. My hostess, that spring day, was the Hon. Mabel Strickland, Editor of the *Times* of Malta, which never missed an issue throughout the blitz. I had brought a Red Army colonel, who was

*Cold work dismantling crashed German bombers*



## TEA ON SERVICE

visiting Malta, to see her; and we sat down to tea in the opulent dining-room of the Strickland mansion amid gardens and lemon groves outside Valetta. There was all the appearance of a sumptuous tea: the silver, the delicate plates, the polished table, the man-servant pushing forward chairs, but it was only indomitable gallantry which could set out a formal tea party in such days as those. At each place was set a small frail cup of almost priceless tea, of course without milk or sugar, and where once had been laid out the thin bread and butter and the baroque pastries, there were lettuce leaves and one-half of a home-grown grape-fruit for each of us. Over it all Mabel Strickland presided with astonishing vitality; family portraits looked on with astonishment, and the Russian colonel expressed his surprise that but one family should possess such a large dining-room for its own use.

If tea was always a solace to the air force, it was sometimes a surprising innovation to those diverse peoples in all parts of the world with which the air force came into contact. The horrors of war were never more forcibly brought home than when Allied aircraft were bringing out of Yugo-Slavia Tito's partisans. Both men and women soldiers sorely wounded, unbelievably stoical, together with children and old people, were carried, hobbled or walked down from mountain hideouts to our secret air strip. Sometimes they went without food for twenty-four hours before leaving in order not to encroach on the meagre rations of those who stayed behind. Very often they would take off their boots and some of their clothing for the benefit of those continuing to fight. They travelled across the Adriatic in air transports—crowded, hungry, exhausted, often gangrenous. On arrival, numbed by the new experience, in the twilight of Italy, they were handed cups of tea, and most of them drank this beverage for the first time in their lives and, as the warmth cheered them, they sang in inexpressibly sad harmonies, peasant and mountain songs.

Finally, let me recall my war-time cup of tea taken in strangest company. We had landed for a few days at the great Goose airport in Labrador. The air-force padre happened to be setting out in a launch across the sound to visit a tribe of Red Indians who had sent a message requesting comforts of the Church. There, in a lonely creek 900 miles from the nearest city, my schoolboy dreams came true. I was introduced to the Chief and to members of the tribe, who had never



*Sunderland patrols often lasted longer than fifteen hours.  
An air-gunner, acting cook, makes a cup of tea*

before seen the King's uniform. There were tents, hand-made canoes, moccasins being sewn, but, alas, no fine feathers. By means of many signs and a few French words, we talked. All our cigarettes were smoked. Then an enterprising airman produced some tea, and I always like to think that what the Chief said over that tin mug was a vow of eternal friendship.

If the incidence of tea upon my recollections of service in the R.A.F. seem somewhat disjointed, it is because memorable tea drinkings in strange places come most easily to mind. Few indeed were the days in which one did not drink tea as a matter of routine. I cannot honestly say that I drank any when I was in Brazil, where they have coffee to burn; but certainly everywhere else, whenever there was an air-force job to do, there also a benevolent authority provided tea.

It might seem to the foreigner a frivolous or unsubstantial claim, but I believe that it could be said in truth that, though Napoleon's armies may have marched on their stomachs, this modern air force of ours flew on tea. Never let it be supposed, albeit, that ours was a temperance organisation.





JOHN LANGDON-DAVIES

## *The Home Guard Brew-up*

**M**Y knowledge of the part played by tea on the home front during the war comes chiefly from personal experience in the Home Guard.

The Sten-gun, the Blacker Bombard and tea—these three, in my opinion, account for the high morale of that very English force.

At no time during my life have I been unaware of the importance of a cup of tea at a crisis. As a small boy in South Africa I had had a mother who could only get through a sub-tropical thunderstorm with the help of the national beverage. And so later, when I had become a husband, at those critical moments when doctors find the father-to-be their worst problem, I had known what to do. Each time when the door opened a little to give me the message: "It won't be long now," I had at once said: "Right-o, then I'll make a cup of tea for all of us."

So, too, when on the strength of having been bombed as a war correspondent by Germans and Italians in Spain and by Russians in Finland, I was asked to write and broadcast on keeping up morale in blitzes, my advice was definite: "On the sound of the alert, get down to making tea. The activity will be good for your nerves, and in case of accidents the king of first-aid beverages will be ready."

In due course Dunkirk came, and after it Mr. Eden's broadcast and the Home Guard. At the request of General Sir Bernard Paget, and later under the guardian eye of Monty, I found myself designing and commanding a tough school for the Home Guard; a very special sort of school, where neither arms training nor tactical training was given. We concerned ourselves chiefly with the art of living and keeping alive in close contact with the enemy.

It is true that we did sniping, ambushing, camouflage, unarmed combat and sentry-killing, but these necessary accomplishments were linked together in a carefully worked-out plan to make every student feel that this was no "course" but the real thing, that he was actually



## TEA ON SERVICE

then and there in contact with the enemy. In this plan there were three main themes, and the making of tea was one of them. We will not bother about the other two.

The enemy was in possession of the village on the hill, two miles away. We were bivouacked in a wood preparing to surprise them when opportunity served. While waiting, we must remain alive and fit.

Rule 1 for fitness was that each man must be able, at least once every twenty-four hours, to help his circulation by brewing and drinking something hot.

Did they know how to make a cup of tea when in close contact with the enemy without giving away their presence to the enemy? If not, they were not properly trained to wage the kind of warfare which they would experience in the Home Guard battle.

It was a new idea to most of them. It was so easy to assume that after having accounted for the German A.F.V. with spigot-mortar or fougasse, the Home Guard hero would bicycle home to find the tea waiting on the hob just as one did any Sunday after the normal Home Guard exercises.

Now this simply does not happen. The only time I have ever seen anything like it in real warfare was in Barcelona in 1937 when the Republicans and certain "uncontrollables" forgot Franco and started fighting one another. There were barricades at every corner, armed with machine-guns and loud-speakers, and every barricade was regularly deserted from noon until 2.30 while opponents, who had just been shooting at one another or blasting one another with wireless speeches from their rival leaders, sat down together to eat in the same restaurant and often at the same restaurant tables. If Hitler's invasion plan had hit us between Romney Marsh and Beachy Head, where my school was, this sort of thing would not have happened.

Well, that was the problem. The enemy two miles off on the hill and some eighty Home Guard secretly bivouacked in a wood waiting to attack by stealth. How were they to cook their own meals without the fires being seen and the alarm given?

In the course of the war, five thousand men of every sort and age—millionaires and miners, stockbrokers and dockers, lieutenant-colonels and lance-corporals—took out their notebooks and pencils and learned the technique of secret tea-making. Then they went back

## THE HOME GUARD BREW-UP

and taught their sections and platoons and battalions, so that to-day in Great Britain close on a million men now know how to brew their clandestine cup of tea.

How is it done? I will tell you. Perhaps it is no longer of practical use, but it still has symbolical value. Those five thousand men who knelt down in absolute silence, scooped out their trenches and with infinite care lit flameless fires and brewed in their billy-cans an infusion of the oriental leaf, with a solemnity, a silence, a secrecy, which showed that to them the enemy really was occupying the village over there—in what other country could their like be found? I would like to think that from time to time in this post-war world respectable ex-Home Guards would steal forth to brew a cup of tea under the noses of their neighbours with all the secrecy which a mere foreigner would suppose more suitable as an adjunct to an important burglary.

The first thing we taught them was that you must brew your tea in the dark, and not by daylight, for though you can learn to hide flame, smoke cannot be hidden. The blue tell-tale cloud hanging above the hazel wood would be enough to attract spandaus and mortars, but the light of a fire can and must be controlled.

You dig a trench a foot deep and in it you lay your wood. The first pieces must be no bigger than a match, and the last no larger than a man's thumb. Properly laid and encouraged, such a fire will glow but not burst into flames, but the wood must be dry. Where are you to find dry wood in the British countryside, bearing in mind the British climate? That is easy, provided you know the answer. There is dry wood to be found even in the midst of a thunderstorm.

Never look for dry wood on the ground. The driest wood is to be found still sticking to the stems of bushes, to the branches of trees. It is the dead twigs which have not yet fallen away, off which the raindrop slides without soaking to the interior. Having been let into this secret, nobody need deprive himself of tea even on a peaceful picnic simply on the ground that it is too wet to light a fire.

But the enemy have ears as well as eyes. We taught them not to snap the twigs from off the trees. We sent them four hundred yards away and let them know how careless twig-snapping rang out like the crack of a rifle, and then we showed them how to prise off the dead

## TEA ON SERVICE

wood with a knife, or how to dull the sound by wrapping their glove round it before snapping it off.

With infinite patience all these Englishmen, from 19 to 60 years of age, some with three rows of campaign ribbons, others who had never seen a weapon fired in anger, learned the technique. Could anything prove more clearly the importance to each of them of that hot cup of tea? They were willing to go to all lengths so as to be thoroughly versed in this supremely important detail of their military training.

At night, the bivouacks were subject to surprise attacks. Enthusiasts from the War Office would come down and persuade the Commandant to let them do a little field work for a change from desk work. Distinguished staff officers would black their faces and crawl painfully through bracken and blackberry, thunderflash in their breast pocket, towards the tired men sleeping in pairs under their ground-sheet shelter. The Commandant, who preferred quiet nights abed, had out of courtesy to come too.

On one such occasion, four hundred yards of expert crawling brought us to a quiet section, bending over their cooking trench and gazing down on the hidden glow, with faces that could be seen to be

(Below) *N.F.S. men welcome a break. Ceylon not only sent us tea—its people were most generous with funds for relief work*

(Opposite) *A café proprietor carries on in a blitzed side-street*





## TEA ON SERVICE

eager in the moonlight. A couple of thunderflash hand-grenades, followed by short, sharp, unarmed combat, theoretically disposed of the whole group. Then their leader was resuscitated and asked what they were doing awake at 3 a.m. on this June night. "Sir," said the sergeant, who came with his men from Battersea, "night after night I have sat up till eleven and twelve with my ears glued to my wireless set, waiting hopefully to hear the B.B.C. broadcast the nightingale. I come down here, sir, with my men, and we haven't had a blinking moment of sleep for two nights now, thanks to those damned birds; so we organised a fighting patrol to drive 'em out of the wood. But we couldn't do it, so we thought the next best thing to sleep would be a cup of tea. There's plenty left, if you'd like some, sir."

And so we sat, two red-tabbed staff colonels and myself, and five Battersea busmen, drinking our tea out of a billy-can while the nightingale sang with unimaginable vigour from a nearby thicket, and all the while we were careful to avoid anything which would make the imaginary enemy over there on the hill suspicious.

Every day at eleven o'clock there was a half-hour's break, and the W.V.S. arrived with their mobile canteen and its huge urn of tea. To be frank, it was generally the most horrible beverage that it has ever been my ill luck to taste and out-did the worst railway-station cup. For some reason, which was never explained, its colour was heliotrope, but throughout the two years and more of the School, every day at eleven o'clock, tired, muddy and bleeding students queued up and drank without noticing what they drank. All they cared for was that it was called tea.

"You know, sir," said a student one day, "if I may say so, the eleven o'clock break with the W.V.S. coming and giving us tea was a master-stroke; it made the whole week-end seem real." This remark puzzled me, and it puzzles me still, but there was no doubt of its genuineness.

All over the country in those days, the W.V.S. would drive to outlying stations, observation posts, military exercises, Home Guard exercises, and with tea, a bun and a packet of cigarettes they would raise the morale of physically exhausted and spiritually isolated men. In the Crimea it was *The Lady with the Lamp*; in England, threatened with invasion, it was *The Lady with the Cup*.

And it was the same, too, with our comrades of the A.R.P. and the

## THE HOME GUARD BREW-UP

N.F.S. At the A.R.P. wardens' post, at least in our village, it was noticeable that the earlier days in the week were more popular for duty than the later. The truth is that every post had its ration of tea for the week, and in the chilly hour before the dawn, night after night, men would take their teaspoons, measure out what they thought to be fair, and brew something hot for the men on duty. Was it not natural that even with the most scrupulous desire to be fair, the tea left by Friday and Saturday tended to be a matter of level, rather than heaped, spoons? Cold and sleepy men, waiting incessantly for incidents, cannot be expected to be accurate to the last leaf, one way or the other.

Talking of the A.R.P. and the N.F.S. carries my memory back for a moment to the London blitz. Nobody can ever estimate the help which tea gave in those days, when, whether we liked it or not, we had to "take it."

As I sit writing these words in a now quiet farmhouse, once upon a time in the very middle of Bomb Alley, in a room from which I saw many hundreds of flying bombs pass, and over a hundred actually brought down, my mind's eye recalls a scene of black shadows lit by dull red glows and writhing yellow flames. It is the City in the early hours of morning, after the final great fire-raising raid. Ludgate Hill, a writhing mass of tangled hoses and pipes: wardens, heavy rescue crews, firemen, ambulances everywhere. A group of men grimed and covered with blacked sweat; looking, through their dirt, more shockingly tired than any men I have ever seen, leaning against broken walls, propped against rubble, flopping down on masses of stone. Somehow a mobile canteen had bumped its way past all the chaos, like a small insect stumbling through a tangled skein of knitting wool. Mugs of tea had been handed round. No one spoke, they were too tired for words. Each man sat or lay staring into his mug, almost too exhausted to hold it for long to his lips; staring like crystal gazers into a little world of comfort which was able, for the moment, to blot out the smoke, the heat, the appalling mass of rubble. . . .

I wonder how many men in this relatively quiet post-war world, sitting down with their families to six o'clock tea, think back now and then to some hour of excruciating tiredness, when a mouthful of something hot just made it possible to carry on.



NOEL STREATFEILD

## *Tea on a Mobile*

“**H**ERE comes the Mobile. I could do with a ‘cuppa’.” All through the war I was in charge, for W.V.S., of mobile canteens serving in the Borough of Deptford in South-east London; a little riverside borough which suffered very badly from enemy action. On various occasions I was given in gallons the official figures of tea which we served on the mobile canteens on the different incidents or, during stated periods, in the shelters. Figures in gallons have never meant anything to me. It is my opinion that if the cups of tea served from my canteen were poured into a giant dock they would comfortably float the *Queen Mary*.

In 1940 and 1941 my canteens would go out at about sunset and feed the people in the shelters. I have often heard, “How grateful the poor people in the shelters must have been for the cup of tea that you brought.” There was, of course, gratitude, though why there should have been, I do not know. It was no more to our credit to serve cups of tea than it was to the credit of the men and women in the shelters that they got up in the early hours from uncomfortable benches, and later from bunks, often while the raid was still in progress, to get somehow punctually to their work; work which ran from making vital munitions of war to cleaning office steps. A far more natural and sensible point of view, and far more common, was criticism. Tea is our national beverage. “That was a lovely cup of tea” is a sentence to warm the tea purveyor’s heart, whether it be Mum in the home, the waitress in a restaurant or the servers on a mobile canteen. There was too, in the early days, a belief (which was hard to shake) that we of W.V.S. were paid servants of the local authorities. The people were not then used to our uniform, and though later they came to recognise it as the badge for unpaid service, it did not alter the fact that if tea is being served then the drinker has a right to criticise. In 1940 I would hear: “Bring me another cuppa tea like this and I’ll report you to the Council.” To the best of our ability we supplied good, hot, strong tea, as sweet as the sugar allowance would permit. It was not always easy. Sometimes we



## TEA ON SERVICE

had to make enormous detours between one shelter and another because of bomb craters in the road. Sometimes our way would be blocked by houses which had fallen into the roadway. On one occasion an unexpected crater was in our way and the canteen fell into it and was only extricated with the utmost difficulty. This meant that we were late on our rounds and the tea was not as hot as it ought to have been. Our difficulties were appreciated, but tea is tea, and, if you are going to serve it at all, you should serve it properly. We were quite often reproved, and rightly so. In every shelter there was a more or less official tea-taster. In some cases it was the shelter marshal; in others a man or woman known to be a good taster. We would serve Mrs. Jones with tea and the shelterers would gather round and watch us. "What's it like to-night, Mrs. Jones?" Sometimes we were rewarded. Mrs. Jones would beam and say, "Beautiful, ducks." On other nights we would

*It's thirsty and tiring work dealing with fires*





*The mobile does its job while the guns blaze away at Nazi bombers  
in a night attack on London*

get dim approval. "Not so bad. Got a bit of a funny taste, though." On the worst nights she would say nothing. In a ghastly silence, broken only by the roar of the guns overhead, she would hand back the cup. If pressed, she would sometimes offer an explanation. "Water wasn't boilin'," or, worst insult of all, "Did you mix some soup in this?" I have often read of the extraordinary speed with which a message can traverse Africa by the tom-tom system. I believe all that I am told about tom-toms, but it is as nothing to the speed with which a message can travel round a London borough about a poor brew of tea. I have no explanation to offer, but it is true that, with perhaps ten shelters to visit, if the first one decided our tea was poor, by the time we

## TEA ON SERVICE

reached the other nine someone would be waiting to say in a loud voice, "Hear your tea's bad to-night."

At that time life seemed all criticism; the shelterers seldom really pleased. It is to-day when it is all over that you realise that, in spite of everything said in 1940 and 1941, the tea service was loved and valued. You meet now the men and women that you served; they do not forget your old sins, but they do remember how cheering the "cuppa" was, and they call out, "If you're passin' tea-time come in and I'll show you how to make a real decent pot of tea."

It was in 1940 that I first learnt from personal experience what a cup of tea can mean. It was a peculiarly nasty night. A heavy raid, almost entirely directed at the boroughs south and east of the river. Through illness we were poorly staffed that night, and there were only myself and the driver to serve on the mobile canteen. Several times we had been forced, when getting the tea down to the shelters, to lie on our faces because of nearby bombs. We were late, we were tired and we were nervously exhausted. Our canteen at that time was parked in the yard of the technical institute, where some soldiers were billeted. As the driver parked the canteen a soldier opened a window and looked out at us. He said: "We got a cuppa tea waiting." There was a pot of tea, milk, sugar and some biscuits. The soldiers had seen us go out and, of course, knew what a hateful night it was outside, and instead of going to bed had sat up to give us a cup of tea. As I drank my tea I was so near to tears that I could hardly swallow because of the lump in my throat. The kindness of thinking of us, the real comfort of drinking tea in comparative safety by a warm fire, was overwhelming. Often, afterwards, I would serve a cup of tea to somebody who was perfectly controlled, but at the first sip their control broke and you would see tears trickling down their cheeks. "Sorry, dear, I don't know wot's made me come over so foolish." I have always been grateful to those soldiers because they taught me what a cup of tea at the right moment can do to you.

In March 1941 we saw the service of tea from another point of view. There was a very heavy raid, directed, it was believed, at ships on the river. The boroughs on either side of the river suffered terribly. At the end of our round we were serving in a shelter when a bomb demolished a large part of the surrounding neighbourhood. Our driver



## TEA ON SERVICE

said that on our way home we would pause outside a school, which was being used by a rescue service, to tell the men that all the shelterers were safe. They might have heard that the street was destroyed and many of their families lived there. As we reached the school, what appeared to be thousands of incendiaries fell, and many of the surrounding buildings were set on fire. Our driver, who was a part-time worker in the rescue service, saw there was an immense amount of work to be done, so he parked the canteen, which was a trailer, sent us women who were serving into the school, and detached the car and took it out to pick up wounded. We had not been in the school many minutes when a bomb fell near us, wounding the majority of the rescue party who had just received a call. Because of a ring of fire on three sides of us and the river behind us, it was not possible for some hours to evacuate the wounded, and they were brought into the school. All we had were the remains of our urns of tea, and, mercifully, a reserve

*Victims of a flying bomb at Peckham*



## TEA ON A MOBILE

packet of tea, tins of milk and some sugar. It seemed poor fare to offer to wounded and terribly shocked men, but it did more than serve. Those wounded who were fit to be given drinks had cups of very sweet tea. All the rescue party had cups of tea. A fire was lit and a kettle put on and we made more tea. All night long, until one hour before the All Clear, the tea held out. There was no doctor present, so it is impossible to assess what our strongly sweetened cups of tea did for our shocked and wounded men, but I do know that when the ambulances got through all our patients were alive and none died later in hospital. I also know, because I saw it, that the rest of the rescue party, shocked though they were, visibly improved as the night wore on, and were able to answer every call for help.

The Battle of London over, the shelter feeding gradually ceased. Not without protest. There were those who were spending the rest of the war in shelters because they felt safer there, or, more often, because

*What the N.F.S. had to contend with—a burning building crashes*



## TEA ON SERVICE

their homes were not fit to live in. These had got accustomed to their cup of tea and their bun, and were most upset when the service stopped. "Shan't 'alf miss me cuppa. Couldn't you manage just our shelter?" Of course we could not. The local authority rightly decreed that the canteen service should be stood down, holding itself in readiness for further service. The further service came a year later in a heavy daylight raid. It was a raid which took place in the middle of the day, and caused not only many casualties but, since it was in broad daylight, nothing was hidden from the public. The mobile canteens were sent to serve tea at a place where a public-house had been demolished. Nobody knew who had been in the public-house. There was a saloon bar, a public bar and the bottle-and-jug department, and each had to be cleared, and it all took time. For three days relatives stood, often for hours, watching the cranes working, waiting for news. The canteen became a sort of clubhouse; over the road there was that unforgettable noise of the heavy cranes working and the clatter of the baskets of rubble as they were tipped off the ruins. Round the canteen, both by day and by night, there was an air of normality. The Deptford women who served on the canteen were largely responsible; they always said exactly the right thing. "Come and have a cuppa tea, dear. We've just made a fresh lot," or "Sit on the step while you drink it, it's tiring standing about."

That public-house incident produced my favourite canteen story of the war. After hours of digging, one creature was brought out alive. A rescue man heard crying under a stone. He told the incident officer and all work was suspended and the stone carefully uncovered. Presently a little furry behind came into view, and there, his face plastered with rubble, was a tiny monkey, Jacko, the property of the man who had been in charge of the public-house. I was not myself present when Jacko was rescued, but I heard the full account the next morning. A warden told me about it. "We carries him to the canteen and forces open 'is little mouth and gives him a cuppa with plenty of sugar. Then we take 'im to the warden's post. Seein' he was a shock case, we lays 'im flat and wraps 'im in rugs. Then a policeman looks in, and 'e says, 'Maybe Jacko could fancy a real decent cup of tea.' The policeman brings the tea in a china cup. The monkey sits up, takes the cup in 'is little 'ands, drinks it all up, then gives 'isself a shake as if to say 'that's a bit better.' Then 'e acts perfectly natural and turns round and bites the policeman."





RUSKIN SPÉAR: W.V.S. CANTEEN AT THE DOCKS







*An air-raid warden feeding tea to a family buried in a Morrison shelter*

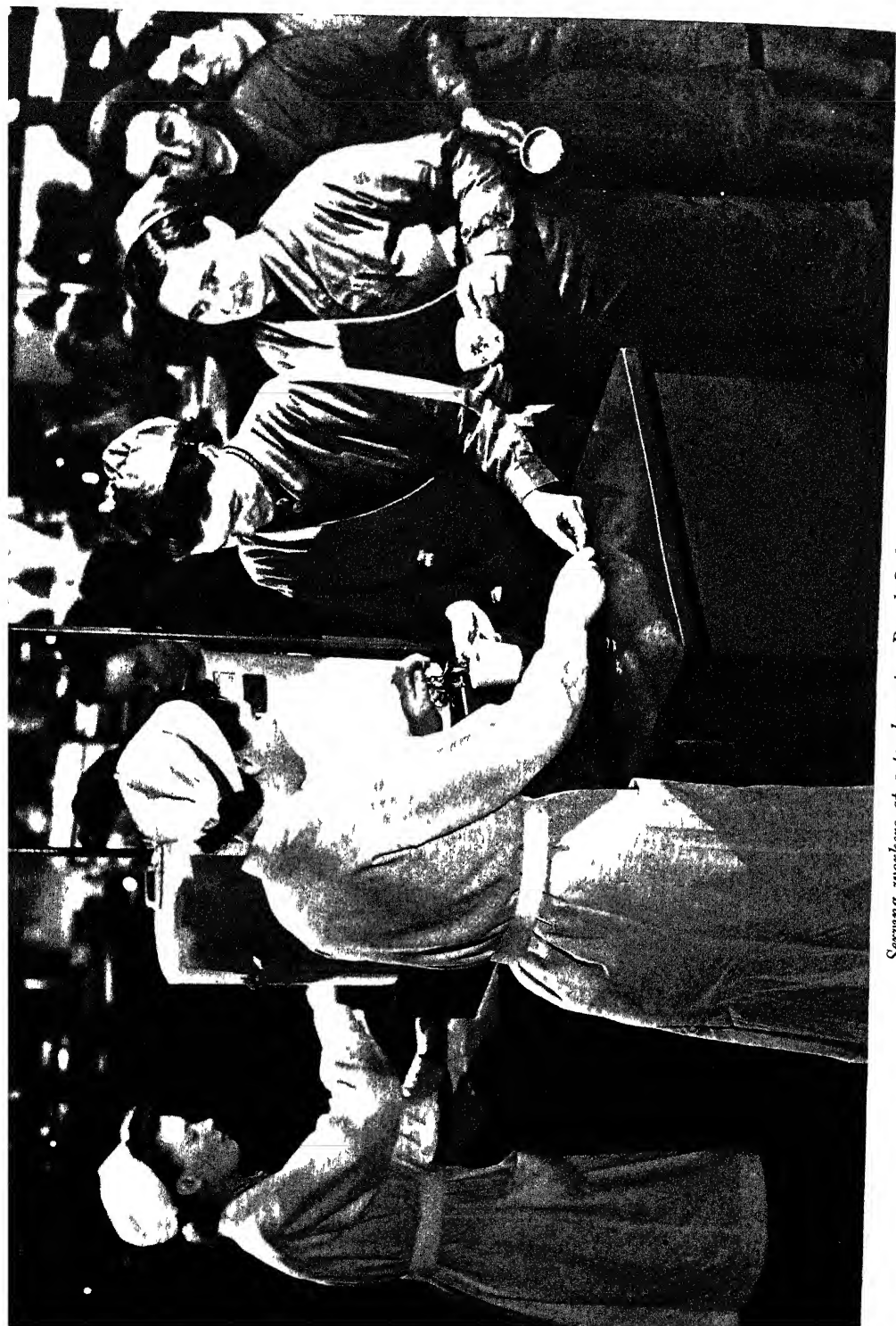
During the flying bombs our canteen worked night and day. There was less of the grim and gay spirit which had characterised the early raids, and more of just grim. Not that Cockneys can be downed, but the situation was worse. Back in 1940 and 1941 furniture could be had and new homes could be had; in 1944, when you saw your home destroyed your chances of getting another were remote, and the chances of replacing your household goods almost non-existent. Then, too, the flying bombs fell during every hour of the twenty-four. It is impossible in a daylight incident to keep all horrors from the public. We became terribly accustomed to seeing the mortuary van and bodies in sacks carried from the ruins on stretchers. Yet once more the canteens serving that absolutely normal commodity—tea—were oases of calm and a reminder of the everyday world. We poured literally gallons of tea into the stricken and bereaved. Too often we heard the cry, “A cuppa strong tea with plenty of sugar, quickly, please.” Yet criticism did not die. Naturally the grief-stricken just drank gratefully and in silence, but the Civil Defence services, the police and those who had lost

## TEA ON SERVICE

their homes but not their relatives had plenty to say. "When's another urn coming? This tea's shocking. More like coffee." "Wot you ladies use instead of tea, I don't know." The grumbles cheered us immensely. Nobody has lost heart while they grumble; it's when they are silent that you have to worry.

Deptford suffered most abominably from what were officially called V2's, but what we called the rockets. The worst incident was when a rocket demolished a Woolworth's stores. It was just before Christmas, 1944. It was the first day that ice-creams were allowed again and the shop was full of women and children. Nobody who was there will ever forget the queues of relatives waiting for news outside the W.V.S. Incident Inquiry Point. We did not only serve those days on the canteen, we sent trays of tea up and down the weary grief-sodden queues. Later, when the incident was closed, we took the tea service to the mortuary. There were men from all the Services who had no family left; there were mothers without children; there were sisters and brothers. Nothing, you would have thought, could possibly have helped, yet tea, even in those terrible circumstances, can help. It broke the ice; people spoke, they said: "Thank you," and "Yes, I would like another cup," and "Just a little sugar, please." Afterwards there were messages in the personal column of the local paper "thanking the W.V.S. for service." By service they meant cups of tea.





*Serving workers at a tea bar at a Royal Ordnance Factory*

TREVOR EVANS

## *The Factory Front*

WHEN Mr. Bevin was Minister of Labour he paid a remarkable tribute to the value of tea in Britain's war factories.

He was speaking to the Works Management Association in London on September 18, 1940. The Battle of Britain was in its wildest fury.

"I arranged with a great firm," he said, "to carry out an experiment for me, because you have to move so much by trial and error. I asked them to adopt rigidly the hours I have set down in the circular I had issued; to give ten minutes' break in the morning, ten minutes in the afternoon, with refreshment. The men had to work till seven at night and then there was a very long journey home, so I asked the management to send round barrows of tea at six o'clock in the evening and to see the result."

Mr. Bevin paused before he continued: "Well, I would like you to see the curve of production, particularly in the last two hours. If a man has been in the habit of stopping at five o'clock, or five-fifteen, he goes home and he gets his meal just after six or about six-thirty. If he has got to work on with nothing to eat—well, there is a sinking feeling, and then when he travels home on a long road (there were a number of women also), there is a great proneness to cold and to infection, and that means absenteeism due to ill health. Now when that experiment I asked for had been going on for a month, I asked a director of the firm if he wanted to give it up and he said, 'Not on your life. I have made too much out of it because of the increased productivity.' "

This was not, of course, the prime consideration which made Mr. Bevin so enthusiastic about supplies of hot tea to war-workers working long hours. He was concerned with the contentment of workers and its effect on labour turnover, which up to that time had been one of the greatest headaches to an administration faced with a desperate shortage of labour.

## TEA ON SERVICE

That was why he repeatedly urged managements and trade-union officials in the factories to give immediate consideration to the widespread introduction of "tea-breaks" in these dark days of the war. Mr. Bevin said, "That short break will represent in a year a great saving in labour turnover, absenteeism through illness, and a great increase in production."

Of course, as the war went on he pressed ahead with his widespread schemes for factory canteens and snack-bars.

By 1943 there were more than 10,000 registered industrial canteens in this country. No war factory was complete without its tea-service. The idea spread to important open-air sites and activities, like shipyards and aerodrome construction, in an organised, scientific way.

There always had been informal, unacknowledged ways of providing tea in the shipyards and on building sites and in factories. They were rough-and-ready improvisations by the workers themselves. The management, in most cases, turned a blind eye to the proceedings.

It took a war to make the custom recognised as a definite contribution towards increased productivity and contentment. There was a

*Trolley service in an Ordnance Factory*



## THE FACTORY FRONT

great irony in all this. The natural inclination of the authorities might have been expected to go the other way; to discourage tea-drinking because of the desire to discourage the carrying of such a commodity as tea so many thousands of miles in ships which were all too precious and all too few.

No, there was a definite, positive and recognisable advantage in encouraging the development of facilities for tea-making in all our great war plants.

Obviously the man who wrote the script which was broadcast by the enemy from Zeisen radio station on the evening of October 4, 1939, must have hugged himself with delight for displaying such profound insight into British psychology.

The broadcaster solemnly announced, "The high priests and priestesses of the cult of five o'clock tea in Britain are clamouring for an early peace. Their tea supplies from Java and China are running short. These high-class victims have been compelled to fall back on the coarser brand from India. The British people are slowly being convinced that Mr. Chamberlain's war is something worse than a temporary inconvenience."

A commentator in the *Daily Express* the following morning added, "Sorry, Zeisen, but you've got it wrong. Four o'clock, not five, is tea-time. And few of us in England drink China tea. And for those of us who do there are still tons and tons of China tea here."

That retort was sound enough at the time, and its tone reflected the reaction of the people to these enemy attempts at undermining our morale.

But the high priests and priestesses of the cult of tea drinking who were most interested in supplies were not the leisured but the busy. And the time for its supreme enjoyment ceased to be either four or five o'clock in the afternoon.

It was as likely to be two o'clock in the morning, during a break in the night-shift. Indeed, my own most vivid personal memory of the mass enjoyment of tea was at a great factory in the heart of the country not ten miles from Crewe. The tea-wagons were being pushed along the aisles of a great aircraft factory. Men and women left their machines for moments to collect their cups, which they placed beside them on



## TEA ON SERVICE

their benches. The flash in the eyes, the luxurious stretching of the limbs, the contentment on the faces, were all more eloquent than any words. And, indeed, more transmittable. The noise of the machines saw to that.

Little was written at the time about this contentment. Indeed, its acceptance was characteristically casual—in factories where provision had been perfected for the supply of tea. It became a routine in the best-organised factories—a routine associated with the climax of the working shift.

All the emphasis was on the reverse side of the picture. The clamouring for facilities where there were none. The outbursts of the staffs where facilities were withdrawn.

It is one of the paradoxes of the war that the beverage which helped production most also caused the greatest outcry when it was not available. Tea, or rather its denial, caused many strikes. Somewhere, no doubt, one of those terrifying statistics of man-hours lost through no-tea strikes could be compiled. It would be done by the usual method of multiplying the number of hours lost by the number of workers involved. These multiplication efforts always result in prodigious figures—especially in a large factory.

However accurate such a sum might be within the conventions of such calculations, how misleading it would be in conveying a picture of the service tea rendered to the British war effort. For the simple reason that no statistics can exist for estimating the effect of the thousands of millions of cups of tea provided officially, and sometimes almost formally, to millions of our war workers.

It is odd to mention formality in connection with a cup of tea. Yet, at one time in the earlier stages of the war, there were quite a number of formal discussions on tea in factories. Why, factory tea even became the subject of discussion at the general council of the Trades Union Congress, the chief policy-making body of nearly 7,000,000 organised workers in Britain. That was in August 1940.

It was disclosed then that the Ministry of Food were considering representations made by the trade-union leaders for special tea allowances to workers employed in "hot and thirsty" conditions. An instruction had been issued by the Ministry to its local food offices to ensure

## THE FACTORY FRONT

adequate supplies of dry tea for workers "who normally require tea as a beverage during working hours."

The Ministry introduced a system of permits for these additional supplies of tea to industrial establishments for specific periods, usually eight weeks. Invariably the time limit was extended for another specific period. And the extension kept on being made—not casually or automatically but because the advantages of the provision of tea in industry far outweighed any difficulties in supply and distribution that were met from time to time.

Indeed, a senior official at the Ministry of Food announced as early as July 30, 1940, "any firm which wants to start supplying tea to its workers now can make application for the extra allowance. I think I can give an assurance that it will be granted."

This official explained that the application would have to be made by the employer, works manager, or foreman, or some responsible person who could state the normal quantity of tea consumed by the workers.

In normal times, he estimated, our tea consumption is about 2.9 ounces a week. "But," he concluded, "there is no rationed commodity which produces more inequalities than tea. The whole object of rationing is to make everyone feel that he is being treated fairly. In the case of tea, though, we know that some classes of consumer have much greater need than others." Which is probably why the workers in blast furnaces were the first in the war to be granted, as a group, the increased allowance.

The conditions of the grant of these allowances did not pass without challenge in many factories. There was an objection raised by some shop stewards that the application had to be made by an executive of the firm. The introduction, and subsequent development, of joint production committees in all major war plants soon overcame difficulties on this score. In many hundreds of cases applications for more tea were made through these joint committees.

All the same, it became necessary to place some curb on extravagance or a too ready assumption that because these permits were granted fairly freely there was little need to exercise care. Remember, that in the great majority of cases the provision of recognised breaks

## TEA ON SERVICE

and of tea was a complete innovation. Managements had no previous experience of providing tea for thousands of workers simultaneously. So there grew up quite a technique in the mechanics of supplying tea.

In the great aircraft factories tea trolleys were favoured. It was a common sight in these huge establishments to see the neatly clad tea-waitress and her trolley standing quietly at the appointed place in the runway between white traffic lines, beyond which she never penetrated, while workers collected their mugs of tea. This system was favoured in establishments where continuous processes made formal breaks difficult.

Specially equipped tea cars became popular on building sites or at establishments where groups of workers were widely scattered. The latest model provides 800 men with fresh hot tea at every service.

Tea bars were established in many munition factories. The bar acts as a focal distributing-point during work breaks. Care was taken to select a good position with room for quick queueing. These tea bars proved useful in factories with widely separated shops, too far away from the main canteen for trolley service.

Canteen counters were specifically designed for smaller factories.

The need for economy in tea at a time when the demand was never greater led to an unprecedented study in the seemingly simple art of brewing a cup of tea. Remarkable discoveries were made in how to conserve supplies while at the same time satisfy the critical taste of some of the most instinctive "tea-tasters" in the world.

One expert calculated that if by efficient estimating of numbers to be served and a study of the art of brewing tea a gallon could be saved daily in each of the nation's industrial canteens, the total saving in a year would be more than 59,000,000 cups of tea. This represents, it was estimated, £247,000 in revenue, 205,300 lb. in weight of tea, 409,500 gallons of milk and 562,500 lb. of sugar.

To me, the significance of these sums now is the indication they give of the extent to which this service grew.

It started, in its present form, as an aid to morale and a stimulus to productive effort. It has not stopped with the end of the war. Indeed, just recently, important trade unions decided at their annual conferences to approach the federated employers in their industries to make



*The tea line—factory girls enjoy their break*

mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks a feature of future industrial agreements.

There is little doubt that many employers will want to retain this feature of their factory routine because of its direct benefits.

Certainly no social historian of the war years in Britain will overlook what used to be a purely domestic symbol. He will have to bestow on the cup of tea its well-earned war honours—won in the factories of this country.

# PART TWO

*The Back-room Story*



HENRY M. CARR: ALL CLEAR

# *Introduction*

By LORD WOOLTON, P.C., C.H., D.L., LL.D., J.P.

I HAVE read this book with pleasure. The stories in the first part of it are attractive in their simple humanity. The second part tells in simple language and interesting detail the story of the production and distribution of tea in war-time.

The story told in "The Epic of Assam" is one that will thrill the reader with pride in an industry that could turn its hand to war-work so different from its normal job and yet produce a bigger yield itself. Whilst the story of the distribution and rationing will indicate not only how efficiently the members of the tea industry in the Ministry of Food dealt with distribution but how humanly they did it. We had a slogan in that Ministry; it was "We not only cope, we care," and the Tea Division lived up most adequately to that slogan. Two ounces per person is not a lot, but we tried, by special concessions, to ensure that no special occasion and no special need lacked the stimulus that every Briton recognises can come from "a nice cup of tea."

Rationing tea was more than a bit of a risk. My experienced political friends told me that any Minister who interfered with the nation's tea committed political suicide. That particular risk did not alarm me; the thing I feared was finding that, owing to U-boat warfare, we should be so short of tea that only the favoured would be able to get it. Rationing saved that—but we had many near squeaks. When London was being persistently bombed, I had to tell the tea blenders to remove their stocks to less vulnerable positions—and at that time we were nearly driven to "Pool Tea." All the organisation was ready for it; the packages and even the labels were ready. It was the logical step to take—by pooling tea, by having one brand for everyone, we should have ensured supplies going round. Not once but thrice when we were in danger did we consider this alternative. And it was an extremely hard conclusion to resist, but I decided to take the risk against the weight of evidence—and fortunately the results justified the conclusion. I recall this incident because I think the decision was important. If we

## TEA ON SERVICE

had given up during the war the blending of tea, the use of brands, if we had decided on this dull level of equality, we should have lost something in our national life. We are a nation of individualists, and our strength lies in persistent determination not to sacrifice that individuality. Taste, individual taste, is worth preserving and cultivating; it adds to the joy of living and flavours existence.

So, during the war, with all its trials and limitations, I'm glad to think that, in some measure at any rate, the people were able to get the sort of tea they wanted from within the Empire.

And very grateful we all were, through many tumultuous nights, to the sailors who brought it to us.



## *The Back-room Story*

IN planning this book it was not intended to tell the whole story of Tea Production, Distribution and Rationing during the Second World War. That the story will eventually be told is certain, but many hands and brains still fully engaged in the Government service will be called upon to contribute to it, and the time for that is not yet.

All that can be attempted here is to supply what might be called a "back-room postscript" to the Front Line story told in the first part of this book.

So far as the growers of tea in Assam are concerned, one glimpse of their work—an immensely vivid one—has already been given in the book *Forgotten Frontier*, by Geoffrey Tyson, published in India during the latter part of 1945. This tells how, in 1942, the Indian Tea Association shouldered the burden of rescuing and caring for the refugees making their way from Burma to India. With *Forgotten Frontier* before us, we have not presumed to do more than refer to that great achievement. But there is much else in the contribution made by the Tea Producers of the Empire which deserves a place in this record, and the following pages are intended as a most sincere tribute to the magnificent job that they did.

In spite of the title to this part of the book, everyone knows that North-east India was in the Front Line, and so gained special prominence. While active assistance was given by British and Indian alike on war-time projects in Assam, and on the Burma Frontier, the planters in South India provided officers for the Forces, and out of 550 when war started, 300 joined one or other of the Services. Because of its geographical situation, South India was not called upon to provide labour.

### *The Epic of Assam*

At the outbreak of war India rallied magnificently, as always, to the help of the Mother Country. Tea, one of the essential commodities needed by the Allies, was being supplied to the limit by

## TEA ON SERVICE

the growers in both North and South India. They had been asked for and had put every effort into increased production for the United Nations. Early in 1942, however, clouds were looming on India's north-eastern border. The gallant British and Indian Army was fighting a desperate withdrawal from Burma against overwhelming odds, and in scorching sun or drenching rain. The Japanese were swarming towards India after their success at Pearl Harbour and Singapore. In March 1942 Rangoon fell, and the battered army made its perilous way out of Burma. Ahead of the Army hundreds of thousands of Indian refugees fled in a torrent. Men from the tea-estate labour forces volunteered their aid, and led by planters and medical officers they went out to help to improve the jungle tracks and to place stocks of food and medical stores along the lines of retreat.

Assam is practically a stoneless country, so that quarries had to be opened down south, and materials had to be brought for hundreds of miles to make runways on airfields as well as tracks into motorable roads. In the early days refugees had added to the difficulties of carrying on the job. From the Burma side the first twenty-five miles was a walk. There were no means of communication. The road rose to 5,000 feet

*Tea-garden labour building roads in Assam*



## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

above sea-level, dropped to 700, rose again to 5,700, and then down to 1,700, where trucks and bullock-carts were available for the remaining 160 miles into India. At one time Japanese patrols were reported forty miles away, and enemy planes frequently bombed and shot-up working parties and stragglers. Weather conditions continued to be most trying. The workers from the estates who had volunteered for the job stood firm, despite the fact that they were frequently bombed. Roads and reception camps were ready. The organising and running of these projects, and all matters of administration, rations, transport, medical supplies and accommodation were the responsibility of the Tea Industry. This huge undertaking never broke down and must be regarded as a remarkable achievement.

The Indian Tea Association had been asked to organise a huge labour force, and this they did to the very limit of their capacity. The gardens were already going "all out" to provide a maximum yield of tea, but, nevertheless, ten Indian men for every 100 acres planted with tea volunteered at once, and over 25,000 men were assembled from the gardens.

By October 1942, this "Shadow Force," as it was called, numbered about 96,000 men; some from the tea estates and more than one-half directly recruited by the Tea Districts' Labour Association for the India Tea Association, but at Government expense.

These men worked on the roads, oil pipelines, quarries and concrete runways, and the hundred-and-one requirements for an advancing army. The workers were volunteers, and were separated from their wives and children, who remained on the tea gardens or in their home villages. This meant that the Tea Industry, by itself recruiting and controlling the "Shadow Force," held charge of the labour situation, otherwise had the Army employed a host of contractors, the estates would have been denuded of labour and the tea gardens in consequence put out of production. The scheme was a success from the start. Trained tea-garden workers were infinitely preferable to a large mass of raw labour recruited otherwise. This heavy drain on the male workers was bound to have cumulative effects in the gardens themselves, though those left behind were working "all out" to keep up production. But it did mean that buildings were becoming neglected and machinery needed care and maintenance.



*A typical view of the mountains on the Assam border*

Preparations were made in 1943 for the victorious return to Burma of British arms and government. Roads and tracks had to be built and improved, airfields constructed for the British and Americans. A road to cover 200 miles from the Assam-Bengal Railway to Imphal, and another 800-mile road from Ledo, the Assam railhead, to China had to be constructed—the life-line to the struggling Chinese. American Engineering Units, with 6,000 Indian Tea Association labourers to help them, completed not only the road but a huge base from which supplies were sent—a happy association between the United States of America and the planters. Modern American equipment and transport was arriving in increasing numbers. Stone, which previously had to be quarried, loaded and unloaded into trucks or railway wagons by hand—tar which was boiled in makeshift oil-drums—rock blasting which was carried out with hand-drilled holes made with crowbars—were soon forgotten in the building up of vast preparations which eventually culminated in the 14th Army “knocking the Jap for six.”

## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

In looking back, it is worth while to remember that besides providing labour, the tea gardens provided their own European personnel to supervise and administer this Labour Force working on the war projects. In North India over 700 out of 1,600 British planters went on service, and details regarding South India were given on an earlier page. It can be stated in round figures that about 1 out of every 2 planters in North and South India went on service. This, of course, meant a great strain, which was cheerfully borne by the men who remained behind, together with their wives, who laboured selflessly to help the unfortunate refugees who had streamed out of Burma, as well as the men in the Services from home, whom the war had landed in a country of few resources and amenities and a climate very different from that of the United Kingdom.

Two very striking letters of appreciation of the work of members of the Tea Industry from Lord Louis Mountbatten, then Supreme Allied Commander, South-east Asia Command, and H.E., now Field-Marshal, Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief, India, are reproduced from among many that were received.

*Naganis doing their bit in road-making*



## TEA ON SERVICE

NEW DELHI,  
14th June, 1945

MY DEAR McLAREN,

I am sure you will be glad to receive the appreciation of the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia Command, conveyed in the enclosed letter, for the splendid service rendered by personnel of the estates included in your Association.

In forwarding Lord Louis Mountbatten's letter to you, I would like to take the opportunity of adding my own thanks and sincere appreciation for the great service you have rendered to the Allied cause in the war against Japan. I know well the value of these services from the early days, when the operational responsibility rested on the India Command, and I know, too, now that Assam has again passed under India's operational control, that I can rely on the continued co-operation of your Association for such further aid as may still be necessary in our combined efforts for the final conquest of Japan.

Yours very sincerely,  
(Signed) C. AUCHINLECK

A. McLAREN, Esq.,  
Chairman, Indian Tea Association,  
Royal Exchange, Calcutta

SC.5/1128/1  
SOUTH-EAST ASIA COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

MY DEAR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,

Now that Assam has been transferred from South-East Asia Command to India Command, I feel that I would like to express my great appreciation of the sterling work carried out by the Indian Tea Association Labour Force.

This Force has provided a large proportion of the labour required for the construction of the Manipur and Ledo Roads, and for almost every airfield and major project in Assam. They have worked cheerfully and well under the most trying conditions and have contributed very materially to our success in Burma.

## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

The Advance Guard of the Force in early March 1942 consisted of only one planter and 100 labourers from his own estate. By the end of March 1942, the total at Manipur Road was 28,500 men, and in October 1942 the Force numbered over 82,000. The strength now still stands at about 67,000 men. When these figures are considered, the magnitude of the effort is apparent.

I would therefore be grateful if you would convey to the Indian Tea Association and to all concerned my thanks for the work they have done and my appreciation of their very great contribution to the War effort.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN

HIS EXCELLENCY,

GENERAL SIR CLAUDE AUCHINLECK,

G.C.B., G.C.I.E., D.S.O., O.B.E., A.D.C.,

Commander-in-Chief, India

### *Ceylon Delivered the Goods*

The story of the Ceylon Tea Industry's war effort may have lacked the drama which so vividly touched the lives of the planters of Assam. Yet the hard, slogging job done on the Ceylon estates deserves one's respect, since without it no such book as this could ever have come to be written. Ceylon does not look very big on the map, but its contribution to the tea supplies of the United Nations was out of all proportion to its size. In fact, not much less than half of every 2-ounce tea ration issued in Britain during the war came from Ceylon.

From the start, manpower was the overmastering problem. Most of the younger planters joined up at once and went off to the war. Military demands for labour were very heavy, and this, with the cessation of imports of workers from South India just before the war, combined to create a serious shortage in the labour forces. As time went on shortages in many essentials began to make themselves felt. The repair of railways and rolling-stock, for example, became more and more difficult, and tyres and spare parts for motor transport dwindled. Textiles were a particular problem, e.g. it was hard to get the "cumblies" (blankets) on which the Ceylon labourer relies so much in wet

## TEA ON SERVICE

weather. Food rations were often difficult to obtain, and the tea-estate workers greatly missed the regular issues of rice, which is normally their staple food.

But taken by and large, Ceylon's war history might have been that of an obscure though busy backwater but for the startling developments in the autumn of 1941. From Pearl Harbour to Colombo is 8,000 miles, yet the results of Japan's sudden, tremendous blow at the American Pacific Fleet was felt almost instantaneously in the Indian Ocean. Within little over two months Singapore had fallen, to be followed by Rangoon, and the Japanese Navy was at large in the waters off Ceylon. It is true to say that the thought in everybody's mind, at home as well as out east, was "Ceylon next," and it was with intense interest and anxiety that the world read of the measures taken to defend the island by the forces commanded by Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton. As it turned out, the Japanese never invaded Ceylon—but the United Nations did! The build-up of military, naval and air force personnel was terrific and temporarily changed the face of the island.

Supplementing this influx of armed forces, Ceylon itself gathered its people for defence, like Britain after Dunkirk. A local volunteer force was recruited, A.R.P. and Fire-fighting Services were organised. Training and exercises were constantly in progress. The Tea Planters took the lead, and much time had to be stolen from the estates, where it could so ill be spared.

The possibility of invasion lingered on for a considerable time. Attack from the air was a perpetual threat—which on two memorable occasions materialised in the form of heavy bombardment on the harbours of Colombo and Trincomalee. In these air-raids the tea producers' vans did fine work in the A.R.P. canteen service, while the industry served more than 6 million free cups of tea to the Forces at gun sites, aerodromes and camps. The producers also presented large quantities of tea to Forces' Welfare organisations, canteens and clubs in the Middle East. We may also mention here their much-appreciated gesture later on in giving packets of fine Ceylon tea to returning prisoners-of-war and civilian internees who passed through Colombo on their way home.

The people of England may only have been intermittently conscious



## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

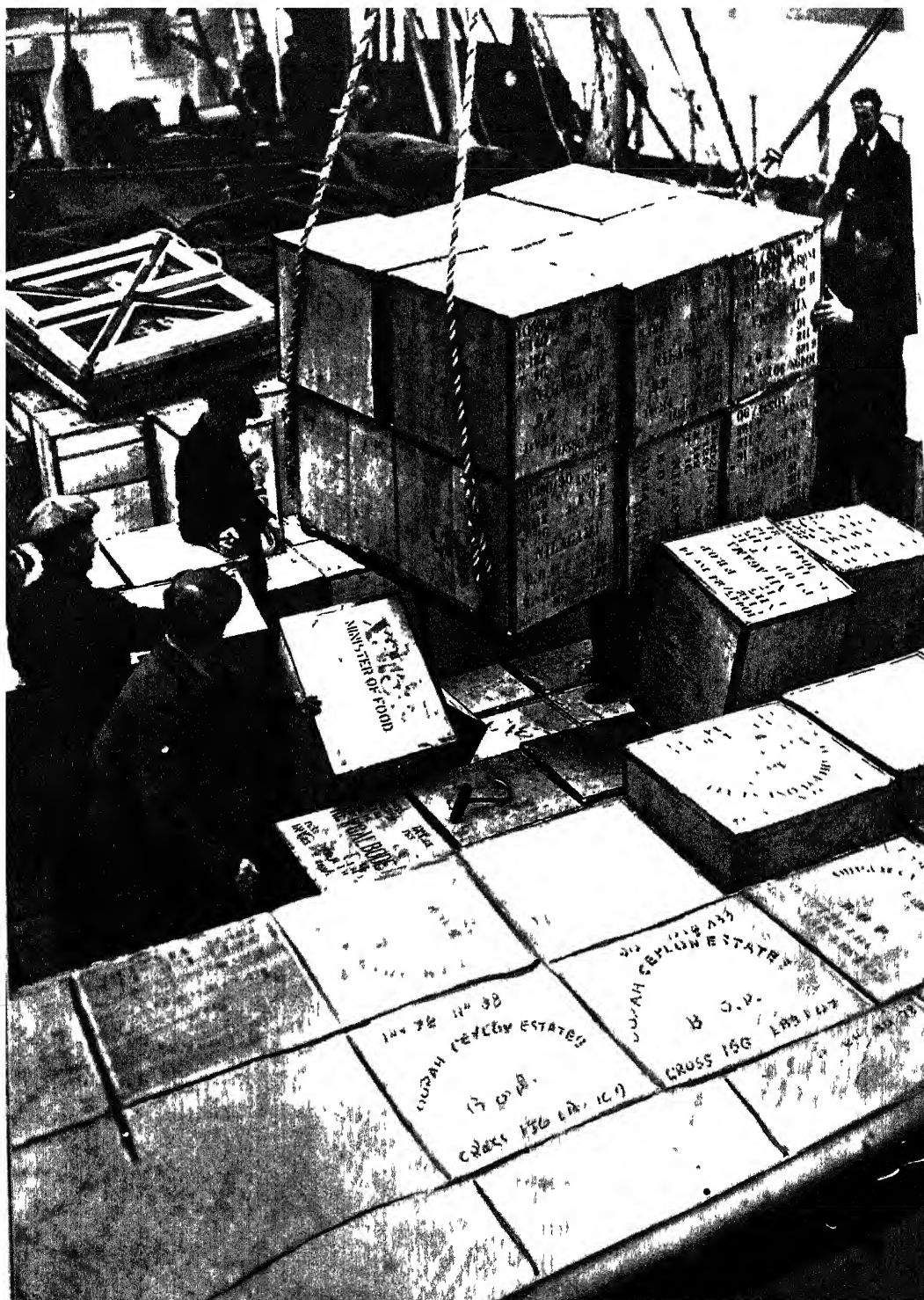
of what Ceylon was doing. They may have done no more than read a paragraph or two in the newspapers, or seen a canteen with the inscription "Gift of the people of Ceylon," dashing through the streets on the way to some incident in the London blitz. Yet in her unspectacular way Ceylon made a quite indispensable contribution to the victory of the United Nations, not the least part of which was to keep our tea-cups filled.

### *How the United Nations Got their Tea*

There was a certain grand simplicity about the method whereby tea was distributed to the United Nations during the war and the period of control which followed. Many other foodstuffs were dealt with by bulk purchase, but tea was really "streamlined." The essence of the scheme was that in 1942, when the shipping problem became acute and prices were going up, the United Nations asked Great Britain to buy the world's tea crop and to share it out equitably among them. If only our post-war problems of international co-operation could be dealt with so straightforwardly!

Of course, there had to be a lot of back-room machinery. You cannot switch a world-wide trading system into new channels by a few signatures on a dotted line. But once the approach had been made to the British Government by other leading members of the United Nations, our Ministry of Food, working in close concert with the trade, was able quickly to convert the paper agreement into a working plan—a plan, indeed, which worked so smoothly that no serious complaint was ever received from any of the fifty-four United Nations, many of whom have placed their appreciation of the scheme on record.

Briefly, what happened was this. The great tea auctions in Colombo, Calcutta and elsewhere were closed, except in so far as they handled stocks reserved for consumption in the countries of origin, and the agents of the British Ministry of Food dealt direct with the producers. Prices were based on pre-war averages, with an addition to cover increased cost of production during the war. Similarly, at the selling end the Ministry of Food carried out its distribution to the United Nations on the basis of pre-war consumption, sales being made at a



## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

common price which did not represent a profit to the Ministry. At all stages the Ministry had the co-operation of the former independent traders. Everyone concerned in commodity controls during the war came up against the problem of "balance of power"—how to hold the ring between the Civil Service and the trade so as to avoid red tape on the one hand and undue commercial influence on the other. Those who have seen something of the inside workings can confirm that the Ministry of Food had a real success here. There was a period of trial and error at the start, but very quickly a satisfactory balance was achieved. The Ministry's Civil Service heads received the full benefit of the trade's expert knowledge and operational skill, but retained freedom of action in determining policy.

Whether in India and Ceylon or in London, the Tea Trade switched its long-established routines to the needs of the United Nations. At the eastern ports brokers and exporters made themselves responsible for the detailed work of valuation of crops, warehousing and so on; tea for the "out-markets" being warehoused separately from that destined for distribution in or through Great Britain. Mincing Lane, similarly, under the Ministry's instructions, provided the machinery for allocation and distribution of tea to the home consumer.

And here it has to be admitted that tea, in common with many other foodstuffs, was the victim of excess of zeal in the very early days of the "phoney" war. Thinking back to 1939 the reader may just recall the jokes then current about "pools"—how all the stocks of, say, caviare were reported to have been conveyed to the Lake District and thence dispersed in penny packets to even more remote hide-outs for the sake of security! Quite a lot of that kind of thing really happened. Anticipating the atomic bomb by a few years, the authorities imagined cities being "wiped out" in a night by air attack. Hectic dispersal methods were decided upon, and in the autumn of 1939 tea was sent hither and thither by road and rail, but mostly by barge. In tea, the chest is the unit, and it is painful to contemplate how long it took to trace the thousands upon thousands of chests thus dispersed and to round off the financial details. But that was a fault on the right side, and it is a fact that the more reasoned system of dispersal which came later did much to reduce losses by enemy action.

"Mincing Lane" is something more than the name of a narrow



*Lord Woolton approves the brew served to tube shelterers*

street. It symbolises the fact that a particular quarter of the City of London is the physical headquarters as well as the business nerve-centre of the world's tea trade. Ninety per cent. of Britain's tea imports come into the London Docks, and the huge warehouses grouped round Tower Hill were magnificent targets for air attack. But though, as will be mentioned later, the destruction of many of them by the foe cost us millions of cups of tea, the country's main supplies were never in danger. Not only were some five hundred emergency warehouses set up, but blending itself, the City of London's great prerogative, was decentralised, and emergency packing and blending plants were set up in Cardiff, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Dundee and Leith. From this, incidentally, followed considerable savings of transport, as cross-hauls were eliminated, and tea was distributed roughly within a reasonable radius of the port in which it was blended.

## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

### *Plucked from the Burning*

Tea is a bulky commodity to store in proportion to its weight. It is also particularly vulnerable compared with some other foods, by reason of its somewhat fragile containers, and also the fact that very slight contamination is sufficient to make it unusable for drinking purposes. The losses of tea suffered by enemy action have to be considered in the light of these facts. Without the foresight shown in the dispersals schemes already described, we might have suffered dangerous, and not merely inconvenient, inroads upon our supplies.

The worst year was 1941, when the records show some 8,500 tons of tea involved in air-raid "incidents." Of this quantity no less than 7,800 tons of tea was recovered from the various sites. This figure relates only to tea in the big warehouses. There were, of course, additional stocks affected by damage to wholesale and retail premises up and down the country.

The lull in enemy action in 1942 and 1943 was reflected in smaller quantities of tea lost or damaged, and then there was a rise again, but only to a figure of under 1,000 tons, during the "Flying Bomb" period in 1944.

As a very rough estimate, it can be said that 11,000 tons of tea in all were affected by damage or destruction of warehouses, and out of this only about 2,000 tons was a total loss. Two thousand tons of tea means a thousand million cups of tea. Quite a lot of home comfort missing! But actually, it was only 0.006 per cent. of the total stock of tea in this country at any one time.

Damage to tea in blitzed warehouses was by the two agencies of fire and water. Fire damage to tea in chests, short of complete destruction, usually consisted of charring of the outer layers and when the charred material had been removed the inner layers were often found quite undamaged. Water was more insidious. As we know, heat and water combine to provide a brew! And Salvage Officers have plenty of stories of rich brown tea pouring down the London streets from warehouses where both agencies had been at work. Even water-damaged tea, however (provided that it had not infused), could be recovered by placing the chests on edge and allowing them to drain, afterwards spreading out the tea to dry. Sieving was also resorted to in order to



*American troops help gather in the harvest*

## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

remove extraneous matter, but where any question of broken glass was involved the tea was always condemned, as it was found, in practice, almost impossible to remove the smallest particles. Incidentally, it was one of the freak effects of blast that minute splinters of glass were frequently found in the very heart of apparently undamaged chests.

All this involved much delicate work, and was carried on throughout the war by a team of experts, under extremely trying conditions. The salvage of tea, like that of all other commodities, involved much personal hazard. Tea does not catch fire particularly easily, but it can smoulder for months, giving off dangerous fumes.

Even tea which could not be used for human consumption did not necessarily represent a total loss to the community. It could be disposed of mainly for two purposes:

(a) The extraction of caffeine.

(b) As a fertiliser.

For the first of these purposes the tea was handed over to the Ministry of Food, who arranged, with contractors, for the highly technical process of extraction. The tea used for fertiliser was mostly that which had been reduced to a hard caked mass looking rather like lumps of peat and sold under guarantee direct to manufacturers.

Tea was also lost, and at times in serious quantities, by enemy action at sea. Some cargoes were sunk and thus lost irrevocably. In other instances water and oil made contact with the tea in the holds of damaged ships. Sometimes, too, the fragile chests were damaged by heavier cargo breaking loose. Then, again, there was the loss caused by inexperienced dock labour handling too roughly the rather inferior war-time type of chest. The effect of letting the corner of one chest drop from a height upon the side of the chest below was not always fully appreciated!

On the whole, however, counting our blessings, as we always must in thinking of the various perils we escaped in the six years of war, we can say that of the tea which the hard-working folk overseas produced for us, an amazingly high proportion reached our caddies safe and sound.



## TEA ON SERVICE

### *The Woolton Tea-spoon*

We do not propose here to describe the detailed procedure for the allocation of tea to the wholesale and retail trades. We have in front of us an admirable chart in several different colours, and with lines and arrows pointing up and down and around. But that is part of the Ministry of Food's own story, which will no doubt be told in full when the right time comes. The wonderful switchback railway, whereby dockets and permits proceeded from department to department, and no doubt had the necessary rubber stamps applied to them at each stage, is something which we are going to ask you to take for granted. The fact that *tea was always on the retailer's shelves when your ration book was presented at the counter* is sufficient proof that the machinery worked. And we can add this, that when we asked a few wholesalers and retailers at random for their views on tea rationing they said they had not got any. Yes, it simply *worked*.

There is, however, an uncommonly interesting story in the way tea-rationing policy developed from the public's point of view. Lord Woolton has already recalled the dramatic moment when, in his first broadcast as Minister of Food, he announced in that crisp way of his "I am going to ration tea." The public had taken in its gigantic stride into war the rationing of bacon, butter, sugar and meat, but the threat to the "national beverage"—and just as additional demands were beginning to be made on it by the nightly vigil between sirens—shook it to the core. It is amusing now to remember that, possibly to mitigate alarm and despondency, the ration was at first referred to as "temporary."

Tea rationing began on July 8, 1940. The ration was fixed at 2 ounces per head, and could be bought at any time within the four-week period, so as not to interfere with the existing packeting arrangements and the use of the standard quarter, half or one-pound wrappers. The important difference between the rationing of this and other commodities was that tea could be bought at any shop without registration.

This experiment of no registration was made to enable the housewife to continue to choose her favourite brand. In other words, no "pool tea!" Everything else, from petrol to ginger-pop, might be pooled, but tea never. As a matter of fact, it was a very near thing. It is no





*A blood donor gratefully drinks her tea*

fearful breach of security to reveal now that there were at least three occasions on which a pooled-tea proposal reached ministerial level—where it stopped! The decision to allow individual brands to continue, however, brought with it special distribution problems. In the case of other commodities—bacon, for example—the bulk supplies could be distributed methodically by a single Allocations Officer, on the basis of the number of customers registered with individual retailers. Obviously this cannot be done if the public remain fancy free and can buy whatever brand of tea they like, *where they like*.

The main difficulty of non-registration emerged when intensified bombing caused sudden mass movements of towns-people into their surrounding country districts, with consequent inroads into the stocks of the smaller shops. At the commencement of consumer control, wholesalers were given a percentage of their normal pre-war supplies,

## TEA ON SERVICE

and it was left to them to allocate these supplies equitably among their various customers—the retailers. At that time tea coupons were cut out from ration books, but were not used for any basis of calculation. Later, when the general cutting-out of coupons had been abolished, retailers were required to state their purchases of tea from particular suppliers, they were then “frozen” to the suppliers and received from the Food Office permits based on the purchases thus disclosed. Later still, coupon-cutting was reverted to for tea, and retailers’ permits were adjusted in relation to the number of coupons they were able to send in to the Food Office. It was not until the issue of the fifth-edition ration book, in July 1942, that tea had its own named coupon—in earlier books a page of spare coupons had been used. This edition of the ration book saw another change. Small children holding the R.B.2 ration books were no longer eligible for a tea ration, and a volley of complaints, irate or pathetic, appeared in the press, mainly from grandparents, about this heartless deprivation! These voices were never completely silenced until the introduction of a special allowance to the seventies and over at the end of 1944.

The first Christmas after tea rationing there was a bonus of 2 ounces per head in Christmas week, and this little Christmas-box was much appreciated. In July 1945 it was possible to increase the tea ration to an average of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ounces per head, obtainable by alternate four-weekly purchases of half a pound and three-quarters of a pound per ration book.

The allocation of tea to the individual on his ration book was, however, only the beginning of the story. For immediately it came to light that all sorts of people were drinking tea away from their homes at all hours of the day or night while in pursuit of their duty or of good works, and it soon became evident that they could not all be expected to carry about with them fractions of their 2-ounce ration for these potations. Which of them really needed tea and which did not? Almost all of them, it seemed.

To begin with, there was the great body of business and clerical workers all over the country for whom no canteens existed, but who had always made tea in the office. Obviously, they needed their four o’clock cup as much as—and more than—ever, though many were the arm-chair critics who wrote furiously to the contrary when a small

## THE BACK-ROOM STORY

allowance obtainable, by means of a special permit, for "Office Tea Clubs" was announced in the press.

Apart from these, there were groups of blood donors, tugboat crews, men dredging in estuaries, barges on canals, volunteers at first-aid posts. There were private citizens sitting all night in deck-chairs on icy hilltops, who became the Royal Observer Corps; there were fire-watchers and roof-spotters, coastguardsmen, roadmen and railwaymen—all those obscure workers who carried their tea-cans hither and thither in the cold grey hours of the morning; and there were men whose jobs made them extra thirsty on account of the temperature in which they worked, such as blast-furnace workers—men who defeated official language and were labelled simply and precisely as "hot and thirsty workers." For none of these were canteens practicable; yet all of them needed with their midnight "elevenses" or their mid-morning "breakfast" a cup of tea to wash down the sandwich with its ever-diminishing filling.

The rural districts had their special problems: the men and women who helped with harvesting and haymaking, the farm workers taking their tea out in the fields all the year round; mothers taking children on praiseworthy visits to distant welfare centres; volunteers making jam at Fruit Preservation Centres; and all the ramifications of civil defence. For while in towns the A.R.P. report centre was able to set up a canteen because of its numbers, in the villages that centre, or post, might be up at the rectory or down at the doctor's, and this arrangement soon became very hard on the lady of the house, who was already trying to squeeze cups of tea from her family's rations to oil the wheels of the innumerable meetings for good causes in which she was involved.

Good causes! Their name was legion and their demands upon the tea-pot probably outnumbered all the rest. No religious body, it seemed, however austere its creed, could hold any type of gathering without refreshment to sustain it; many, but not all, combined with their meetings some contribution to the national effort, and to adjudicate on their respective merits can have been no enviable task.

Finally it was decided that only working parties of a national character, such as British Red Cross and Hospital Supply Depots, working for not less than four hours at a time, could be regarded as eligible for a tea allowance, and that social and charitable functions,

## TEA ON SERVICE

with the exception of treats for children, and the sick, aged or blind, must rely on their own resources.

There were inevitable cases of hardship, such as that of the village blacksmith or other master man who felt that he ought to be treated as a "one-man tea club"; but as it had never been a part of British rationing policy to grant extra individual rations—with the exception of the special cheese ration for certain workers in country districts for whom industrial canteens were not feasible—the issue of a special tea permit was made conditional on the tea being brewed communally, so the man with no employees could not qualify.

Organisers of weddings and funerals were also among the claimants of special concessions and, consistent in its aim to interfere as little as possible with family habits and customs, the Ministry of Food early on made an allowance of tea and other commodities for small wedding parties held at home.

The final tea concession was the response, already mentioned, to the long-sustained plea of old people for an extra allowance. From December 10, 1944, extra coupons could be obtained by those who had reached the age of seventy, entitling the holder to an additional 1 ounce per head per week. These concessions completed the "human case book," so far as tea was concerned, of a war-time Ministry whose handling of this, as of other problems, was recognised by the public as being sensible and kindly.





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